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October 9, 1998

COMMONWEAL

SEX REPENTANCE STARR
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ASIA
HMO'S MEDICARE POLLS
HYDE GINGRICH TAXES
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THE ELECTIONS OF 1998

Wilson Carey McWilliams

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Ole! Twice!

The September 11 issue includes two pieces that deserve high praise. The editorial, "The President," is the best piece I have read on this thorny subject. Balanced, reasoned, unbiased, it deserves to be read by all sides on this topic. And Andrew Greeley's cogent sociological analysis of Vatican II is equally balanced, reasoned, unbiased. Ole!

BROTHER THOMAS MORE, C.F.X.
Louisville, Ky.

A dispensable president?

If the general content and style of your magazine are equal to those of "The President" [September 11], the editorial in the first issue of my new subscription, I've struck a literary mother lode.

That said, allow a criticism. Like the speech by Senator Joseph Lieberman, the editorial built up soaring hopes within me but then left me dismayed and deflated. The prudential restraint against rushing to judgment (what a tired phrase that's become) shortcircuits the more important need to be logical. If one considers, as you do, that the president is waist deep in ethical muck, the conclusion must be that William Jefferson Clinton is *the* problem. Why must the nation's hallowed principles be twisted, mangled, ignored, to keep him in office?

You hint that this president is indispensable because of his economic accomplishments. Do we now live by bread alone? If this president is indispensable, what need is there of law? Let's cease pretense and have the first American monarch.

You are resoundingly silent about the effect on our children of this president's incontrovertibly immoral behavior. What a role model. Finally, you seem to suggest that this president can still govern effectively; you lean against resignation or impeachment because a vice-president under official investigation "would be no guarantee of stability in government." But that might be the lesser evil in light of the ominous shadow of yet another independent counsel looming over the president.

MANNY ROXAS
Las Vegas, Nev.

The original sin

Your otherwise balanced account of the Clinton contretemps leaves out one highly significant fact—as does nearly everyone else's. In the whole affair there has been only one indisputable crime, and Bill Clinton didn't commit it. Linda Tripp did, with Kenneth Starr's approval and assistance, possibly at his behest, when she taped her conversations with Monica Lewinsky without Lewinsky's knowledge or permission, an act against the law in Maryland, where it took place. It would seem that every subsequent act by the prosecutor has been illegal, for every one of them was based on tainted evidence. That suggests at least that Clinton's deposition—indubitably a lie—was still not indictable. Can you be considered to have committed perjury if you answer untruthfully a question your interlocutor has no legal or moral right to ask?

For all of Clinton's squalid, immoral, unseemly, and reckless behavior, he has in no way ignored or overridden the law. Starr has. Maybe Congress should inquire into his actions—and his motives as well, especially since his response when someone called attention to his misdeed was to subpoena the whistle-blower.

MARIAN BURKHART
New York, N.Y.

Helpful history

I am no great fan of Andrew Greeley, but I believe his article on the revolutionary character of Vatican II ["The Revolutionary Event of Vatican II," September 11] served an extremely useful purpose. It jogged our memories of history, and that is something we Catholics need.

In conversations with fellow Catholics, both liberal and conservative, about the path the church is taking, I am struck by how often ideology trumps history, and how often the ideology is thin stuff, a blend of time-bound religious perceptions and the chatter you hear on television.

We need more sense of history so that we will be less superficial. We need to know that the church is not doomed always to follow the apparent direction of the moment.

The Dominican Simon Tugwell has written: "The church has known many different moods in the course of her history. Sometimes she appears to be very confident of herself and of the value of her message, sometimes she seems rather to be a bit confused and unsure of herself; sometimes she boldly tells everyone exactly what they ought to be doing, sometimes she gives the impression of groping in the darkness. And it is not necessarily in her 'best' moments, when she is most confident and clear, that she is most true to herself."

WILLIAM F. BELL
Lenox, Mass.

The Spirit at work

Although Andrew Greeley ends with a statement of his belief that "the Spirit was at work within the council," not once does he mention what difference the person of Jesus Christ makes in our lives. Greeley's reflection is brilliant on how Vatican II changed everything. Yet much more needs to be said on how Vatican II was itself a response to underlying historic developments. Thus we need sociological studies of people who prepared the way for Vatican II and eagerly awaited its emergence.

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COMMONWEAL

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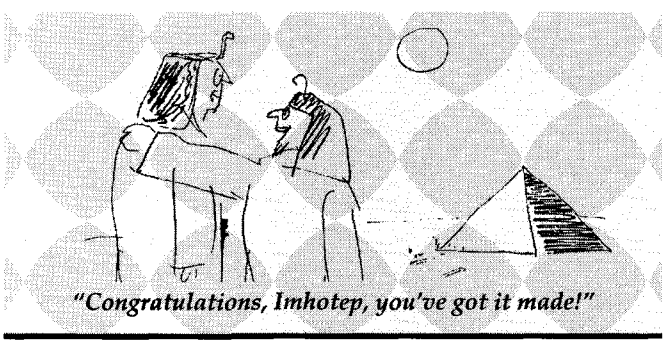

"Congratulations, Imhotep, you've got it made!"

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In the spring of 1955 as a Korean War veteran beginning college studies, I was acutely aware that my Catholic faith had given me little if any appreciation of my life in the world. Had it not been for my discovery of Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*, I doubt very much that I would still be a member of the Catholic church. An ongoing study of the public ministry of Jesus Christ convinces me that the Spirit is now at work in the world, preparing the ways for Vatican III.

RAY STROIK
Stevens Point, Wis.

No new ghettos needed

Kevin Codd's article ["Bring Back the Ethnic Parish," September 11] deftly describes the process, and the pain, of cultural change in some American parishes. He dismisses too casually, however, the concern that new ethnic parishes could repeat past mistakes, and he is too optimistic about the new parochial structures he proposes.

It is certainly difficult to build a vibrant faith community among people who speak different languages and share no common cultural bond. But similar problems rise in more or less homogeneous ethnic parishes as later generations intermarry, cease using the mother tongue, and gradually shed national traditions. In parishes where the influx of newcomers is not homogeneous, the problems must be compounded.

But Father Codd's "Modest Proposal" would seem to be of little value in dealing with these two situations. Balkanizing our parishes and ghettoizing our immigrants is neither prudent nor practical. Here in Northern Virginia, for example, it would be simply impossible for each of our several dozen Latino, Asian, and African language groups and nationalities to be served by its own pastoral team. How could a few bilingual priests, deacons, and lay ministers—many of them also coping with the problems of adjusting to life in this country—serve these new ethnic "parishes without boundaries," their members widely scattered?

Past experience suggests that a new generation of ethnic parishes would risk becoming spiritual ghettos, isolated from the life of the larger community, perhaps led by clergy with little understanding of American ways. Instead of repeating that mistake, shouldn't we use our limited resources to strengthen the "parishes within parishes" that already exist, and to form "pastoral flying squads" to give more limited transitional support to smaller and more scattered ethnic groups?

T.F. STOCK
Arlington, Va.

Double identity

Re: "Bring Back the Ethnic Parish": I am a Hispanic immigrant married to an American with roots deep in this land. I would not want to have to give up my Hispanic identity in order to worship, any more than I would want my wife to abandon her roots for the same purpose. My fear is that if the ethnic parish becomes an exclusive model, people in ethnically mixed marriages will feel they do not belong in either kind of parish.

Recently we renewed our wedding vows at an archdiocesan event for couples celebrating key anniversaries. (Ours was the twenty-fifth.) As with all such events in our archdiocese, one of the Scripture passages was read in Spanish, and I was selected to do the reading with my wife by my side. I realize that less than 10 percent of the congregation understood me, but I was thankful for the archdiocesan policy.

My faith is not a Hispanic faith or an English-speaking faith; it transcends culture and language. So also my wife's. I do not oppose ethnic parishes but I prefer one where we both can feel at home. That cannot be accomplished by a parish where my people are ignored, or by a parish where hers have no place.

PEDRO J. SAAVEDRA
Garrett Park, Md.

Saving Pvt. Ryan—and me

Thank you, Richard Alleva, for the fine appreciation of the movie *Saving Private Ryan* [September 11].

I saw a truth for my own life in this story. I saw the tremendous effect on a man, Private Ryan, when he looked into the eyes of one who sacrificed his life for him and heard the request that he try to "earn this."

That was enough to influence Ryan's behavior for a lifetime, as he tried to be worthy of so much unmerited love. Now, if we look into the eyes of Jesus and let the realization of his love and saving sacrifice become so real....

JOHN BERNBROCK, S.J.
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Fact-finding on Pius XII

Despite my delay in writing, I hope to respond to Father John Pawlikowski's article, "Pius XII & the Jews" [July 17]. Documentation on this topic can be found in the eleven volumes of *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs á la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. The Reverend Pierre Blet, S.J., the last surviving co-editor of *Actes et documents*, has just published a lengthy defense of Pius XII in France; I understand that an English translation will soon be available.

The documents show, for example, that until his death in August 1944, Cardinal Luigi Maglione, Vatican secretary of state, the first person to see Pius XII every morning, frequently instructed Vatican representatives in Nazi-occupied countries to intervene on behalf of endangered Jews. The pope's critics such as James Carroll and Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center continue to

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Bombs awry

The United States has every legal and moral right to retaliate militarily against those responsible for terrorist attacks such as the August 7 bombings of American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya (*see*, "The Bomb Next Door," page 10), and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that killed more than 250 people. In exercising that right to self-defense the United States also has a legal and moral duty to make sure that any military action is proportionate to the crime and to identify properly the guilty parties before it acts.

In justifying the August 20 U.S. cruise-missile attacks against the Afghanistan training camps of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Sudan, the Clinton administration claimed that it had compelling evidence linking bin Laden to the embassy bombings as well as to the Sudanese plant, which allegedly produced a rudimentary component for VX nerve gas. Moreover, the United States claimed that the missile attacks were necessary to forestall yet another terrorist action by bin Laden, a millionaire Islamic fundamentalist who is financing a holy war against the United States and its Middle East allies.

Some critics suggested that the resort to force was intended to divert attention from Bill Clinton's ongoing legal and political problems. Those charges have not subsequently been substantiated, and the resolute but circumscribed nature of the U.S. military response earned the admiration of many. But now a growing body of evidence suggests that, although bin Laden's connection to the embassy bombings justified the military strikes against his Afghanistan installations and forces, the destruction of the pharmaceutical factory was in all likelihood a hasty miscalculation based on unreliable intelligence.

Contrary to initial U.S. claims, the factory appears to have had no direct financial connection to bin Laden. Indeed, the administration now concedes as much. Worse, there exists no convincing evidence that the plant was surreptitiously producing material for chemical weapons. So far, the United States has refused to allow any independent examination of "soil samples" that reputedly provide physical evidence of a nerve-gas link. To do so, the administration says, would be to compromise espionage sources. However, British scientists familiar with the Khartoum plant have cast serious doubt on U.S. claims. It also seems that the "trace elements" of the chemical compound Empta, supposedly present in the soil samples, could be the byproduct of the factory's pesticide manufacturing processes.

Thanks to the efforts taken by the United States to minimize casualties—as well as to much good luck—no one was killed in the pharmaceutical plant bombing. But a facility producing desperately needed agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines for a war-ravaged area was totally destroyed. Unless the United States can more convincingly demonstrate that the plant was part of a terrorist network, it has a moral obligation to rebuild the facility. People of good will everywhere instinctively feel moral revulsion at terrorism's wanton disregard of innocent life. The United States mustn't squander support for its counterterrorist efforts by acting in a way that places the lives of innocent people at further risk. Nor can it afford to give further credence to the grievances that fuel terrorism by arrogantly failing to acknowledge when it has made a mistake.

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ONLY IN AMERICA

On September 21, world leaders gave President Bill Clinton a standing ovation at the United Nations. A few days earlier, Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, stood perplexed at the president's side as reporters questioned Clinton's moral authority to govern; Mr. Havel reiterated his friendship for the besieged Clinton. Ditto Nelson Mandela, South Africa's national hero and retiring president, as he received the Congressional Gold Medal from Clinton before a gathering of Congress.

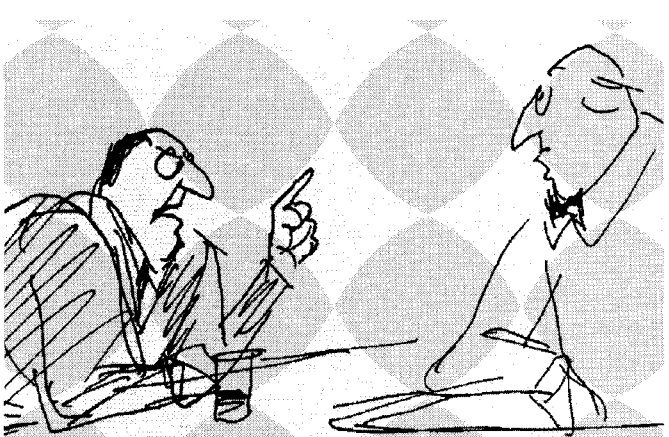
Are these world leaders moral nihilists?

Or are they simply indifferent to our national obsession with Monica Lewinsky, Kenneth Starr, Henry Hyde, David Kendall, Newt Gingrich, Paula Jones, and, oh yes, Bill and Hillary Clinton?

Or could there be something truly terrifying for the rest of the world in watching the one and only superpower preoccupied with salacious sex? There are, after all, more important problems facing the world than either the sins or the fate of Bill Clinton: the economies of Japan, Brazil, and Southeast Asia; the political and economic shambles in Russia; the bloodletting in Kosovo; the barely breathing peace talks in the Middle East; the precarious state of a globalized economy; the coming shift to a single currency in Europe, to name but a few.

World leaders, and everyone else, are right to worry. The American political elite—politicians, journalists, lawyers—seem driven by interests that have little to do with governance, the Constitution, or the state of the world. For some, it is the destruction of Bill Clinton, rogue, scoundrel, and apparent penitent. For others, it is bitter partisanship magnified by congressional elections. And for still others, it seems simply to be the prurient pursuit of everything we already know.

In the minutes before the Clinton videotape was released and televised on September 21 (and shortly before the standing ovation at the UN), CNN anchors Bernard Shaw and Judy Woodruff intoned the holy words, "momentous" and "historic." In contrast, a word that befits their pompous *gravitas* (and that of their fellow anchors) might be "absurd," or even "silly." This is not a Greek tragedy. It is a tawdry soap opera. Time to turn off the TV? Time to turn our attention to those genuinely historic and momentous issues that beset those world leaders?



"Call me an incurable optimist, but I'm hoping for the Clinton administration to usher in the age of miracles."

Continuing the Conversation

- THE SECRETARY OF WAR ASKS THAT I ASSURE YOU OF HIS DEEP SYMPATHY IN THE LOSS OF YOUR BROTHER PRIVATE FRANK J SUREK REPORT RECEIVED STATES HE DIED SEVENTEEN FEBRUARY IN ITALY AS RESULT OF WOUNDS RECEIVED LETTER FOLLOWS
- THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR BROTHER PRIVATE FIRST CLASS JOSEPH D SUREK WAS KILLED IN ACTION THIRTEEN JULY IN FRANCE LETTER FOLLOWS

On August 24, 1944, at 12:43 in the afternoon, a ticker in a Pennsylvania Western Union office hammered out a telegram addressed to Mr. Leo Surek of Beaver Brook, Pennsylvania. A United States Army officer was dispatched to deliver the missive to the clapboard home of Mr. Surek, my grandfather, who was underground at the time in the anthracite caverns of Carbon County. Instead, his wife Rose opened her door to the uniformed messenger, and knew instantly. Moments earlier, she had been sitting in her living room, cradling her newborn daughter—my mother. Both cried as the olive-clad soldier awkwardly tried to offer comfort.

Four months earlier, the scene had been rehearsed when Frank Surek was killed in Anzio, Italy. Now his brother Joseph was gone, too, lost somewhere in France.

For as long as I can remember, Frankie and Joey's pictures have hung in my grandparents' living room without fanfare or decoration—two simple black-and-whites of two proud soldiers. It was provided by the Army so mothers and fiancées could have a photo hanging on the wall at home or hidden inside a treasured locket; he was their son, their would-be husband, their hero, and he promised he'd be back home when it was all over. It was also the same photo, when it was all over, that would appear in the newspaper and christen a new goldstar mother.

After the Surek brothers died, everything they touched became a relic: the letters home, the G.I. Christmas cards, the telegrams, the official letter from President Roosevelt, the Purple Heart, and the burial notice. All were sacred; family history became hagiography. Today, the telegrams are sheathed in plastic, a letter is pleated by its original creases, and the Purple Heart is encased in its presentation box. My granduncles rest side-by-side an ocean away in an American military cemetery in St.-Laurent, France.

It has never been easy for me to explain what it means to grow up in a family that lost two uncles in that second great war. I never met them, but I was never allowed to forget them. Just as my grandfather's mining tales reminded me that this family understood the meaning of labor, the tears

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that welled up in his eyes at the mention of his brothers, Frankie and Joey, showed me that the family also knew about loss. While the brothers were fighting in Europe, two other Surek sons were stationed overseas, on in the Philippines and one in Panama. Their only remaining brother, my grandfather, received deferments every six months because mining was an "essential wartime occupation." Thus, when word came that both Joey and Frankie were dead, few family members were there to receive the news. War revisited Beaver Brook a few more times in 1944: my grandfather's first cousin was killed, as was a childhood friend of my grandmother.

I have often wondered how it felt to lose two brothers in combat. As an only child reared in New Jersey at the end of the cold war, such realities seemed far removed. It has been an equally daunting task to fully appreciate the sacrifices of granduncles who were killed in a war that I understood only from sanitized statistics or descriptions in history books. That is, until I went to the movies this summer.

Richard Alleva's review of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* was worthy of its powerful subject (*see, Commonweal*, September 11). Since the film dealt with the fate of a soldier who loses all three of his brothers in the war, I thought it might echo the experiences of my own family. It surpassed all expectations. Art imitated life.

One of the film's battles took place after D-Day, in St.-Lo, France, and featured a sniper firing his rifle at Allied troops from the cover of a church steeple. In 1944, PFC Joseph Surek was killed after being targeted by a sharpshooter hiding in a steeple. It happened in St.-Lo, only days after the D-Day invasion.

For twenty-two years, I saw a Purple Heart handled with reverent care and read letters that were read and reread and refolded for half a century. My mother remembers her father sitting in his rocking chair and crying when he thought of his brothers. Nobody ever "got over" their deaths. There was no recovery, no rationalization. When Joey died, my grandmother said, it was just too hard to believe. They have remained numb ever since.

When I walked into that movie theater, I had thought about my granduncles, the war, and what it meant to lose family. Hearing the vague references to their heroism and seeing their saintly memorabilia had instilled in me a sense of my family's loss. But Steven Spielberg completed the picture and gave me a perspective that I never expected. He showed me what it meant to die in war—to rush into a flurry of bullets, to call for your mother in your last breath, and to be killed in a small French town, the victim of a sniper hidden away in the heights of a deceptively benign church. Spielberg helped me to appreciate what my family could never bring themselves to imagine: the unpretentious bravery and courage of my granduncles, two men who literally helped, as Stephen Ambrose has written, to save the world.

A Purple Heart will never look the same to me. □

Brian P. Murphy, *a free-lance writer, is a recent graduate of Haverford College with a degree in history.*

OF SEVERAL MINDS

WILLIAM PFAFF

KILL PRIVACY, KILL FREEDOM

Armageddon in the culture wars

Recent events have delivered a serious blow to personal and judicial privacy in the United States. There cannot be liberty without privacy. It is essential to the mutual confidence among citizens that is necessary to self-government.

The defining characteristic of totalitarianism is its assault on privacy. The individual in a totalitarian state is deprived of privacy in order to destroy his or her liberty.

The publication and broadcast of President Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony were rationalized by an appeal to transparency. However, the public does not have an unlimited right to know. There is a countervailing public interest in the protection of privacy.

This violation of the traditional confidentiality of grand jury testimony, harming not only the president but Monica Lewinsky, a private person, and other individuals associated with the president, was actually intended to serve partisan advantage and sway public opinion in the run-up to the congressional elections in November.

A description of the president's behavior with Lewinsky would undoubtedly have come out in the course of congressional deliberations over impeachment — assuming that those take place. That would at least be part of an orderly and constitutional consideration of the issues. It is imaginable — in another House of Representatives, at least — that the lurid details might have been withheld out of respect for the people concerned, and for the public.

The media have their own responsibility to face. Their conduct (since, notably, the Gary Hart affair in 1984) has increasingly been marked by "gotcha!" tactics, which often amount to a form of entrapment (in effect if not in law) — not unlike methods used by Judge Starr in developing his case against the president.

The prosecutor or the journalist asks questions which intrude into the privacy of another; the other denies the allegation or implication contained in the question; and the inquiry henceforth is no longer ignoble scandal-mongering but has become an investigation into suspected lies or perjury. No one is safe from this.

European critics of the United States like to say that all this is the result of American puritanism. Puritanism cer-

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tainly has been a deep influence on American civilization, but what is going on now results mainly from the culture wars waged in the United States since the 1960s.

These have subordinated political differences, which by definition are negotiable, to an ideological struggle over values intended to change American society. This combat allows no compromise or negotiation. Sex and scandal are mere weapons of opportunity.

There was in the past a public code of conduct in Washington, and in American society, concerning private lives, which was generally respected, if often in the breach. It was understood that no one's interest was served by overturning a code of public decorum which protected the essential privacies of a civilized society.

Today, this is condemned as hypocrisy. Nothing now is barred. The political conflicts of the past were also ruthless, but they served political, class, regional, and moneyed interests. Today's ideological wars are aimed at the elimination of enemy ideas from the American moral landscape.

The American public does not like this. Its continued support for Bill Clinton, despite what has been revealed about his behavior, demonstrates popular distaste for what Mr. Starr and the Congress have made of the affair.

The public's revulsion against the fanatical partisanship which exists on both right and left (the abortion and homosexual wars, for example, display equivalent fanaticisms) is partly responsible for the extremely low level of electoral participation in the United States today. Expressed public hatred of politicians, as of journalists, is unprecedented. All this is a very bad sign for representative government.

Beyond appealing to an unrecoverable past, I have little that is constructive to propose. Too many interests profit from the present situation. Those who want change are inclined to conclude that they are isolated and that action is futile.

The press, for example, says that competitive pressures make it impossible not to collaborate in the destruction of privacy. I would say that if the mainstream press, or an influential part of it, refused to report unsubstantiated and salacious or scandalous allegations from partisan sources, refused to reprint such reports published elsewhere, and applied a serious standard of public interest to matters invading individual privacy, this could do much to restore responsibility to public life. But who will take such a lead?

Those who did so would be attacked for abridging the people's right to know, although this is a false argument. To defend the people's right to privacy is to defend the people, and to defend liberty.

Congress justified what it has done as allowing the people to judge. Under the existing Constitution, it is the duty of the Congress to judge. If the Congress and the states want to install government by popular referendum, let them do so. But government by public opinion polls is government by impulsive judgment and unconsidered opinion. Congress is mandated to represent the people, not pander to them. □

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OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

LOOSE NUKES

The real Russian meltdown

Before President Bill Clinton went to Russia in September, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Graham Allison, now director of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, called attention to the reason Russia's economic disaster matters to us. And matters very much. "Start with 7,000 nuclear warheads: armed, mounted on missiles, capable of arriving at targets in the United States less than an hour after a decision to launch," he wrote, and added other horrifying details of Russia's still-existing super-power arsenal. We face "the threat of 'loose nukes,' the theft of one or a dozen weapons, sale to a rogue state or terrorist group, and their use to threaten or attack Americans at home and abroad."

It was obvious in face of such facts that the president's focus in Russia should have been, as Allison said, getting control of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. What happened? Clinton and Yeltsin signed a pallid minor missile agreement and announced it at a press conference where questions about the Lewinsky affair were as numerous as were any questions on policy.

Add this to our comparatively tepid responses to the nuclear arming of India and Pakistan—and to news of a vast secret underground nuclear facility in North Korea—and it is clear that, as normal citizens, we do not fully comprehend the danger or give thought to what our national policy should be. Our leaders have been distracted, our sources of information have been distracted, and so have we.

"But what good would it do if we were not distracted—if we were fully aware?" asked a friend. "There is so little we can do." What we can do is summon and express concern. Concern affects policy and eventually brings action. That was certainly the belief of the 50,000 who assembled in Hiroshima this year on the fifty-third anniversary of the world's first atomic bombing. It was also the belief of the 250,000 who marched in Calcutta on the same anniversary and chanted, "We don't want the bomb! We want peace."

The anniversary was scarcely noticed here in the country responsible for that bombing and the devastation it wrought. Moreover, it is likely that the Senate will not muster the two-thirds majority necessary to ratify the proposed worldwide test-ban treaty. It has already failed to

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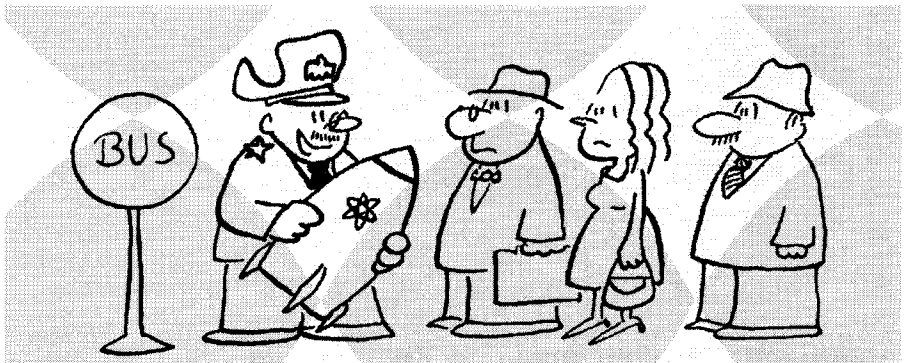
vote the funds necessary for its implementation. Failure to ratify the treaty underscores that those who represent us still give assent to the concept of nuclear deterrence. They have not forsworn first use, and do not seem to have the will to move toward the elimination of nuclear weapons. India's test was motivated in part by our failure to reduce our weapons significantly.

The above is enough to call to mind and affirm Thomas Merton's prediction (quoted in the August-September *Catholic Worker*): "It is the sane ones, the well-adapted ones, who can, without qualms and without nausea, aim the missiles and press the buttons that will initiate the great festival of destruction that they, the sane ones, have prepared....The sane ones will have *perfectly good reasons*, logical, well-adjusted reasons for firing the shot. They will be obeying sane orders that have come sanely down the chain of command. And because of their sanity, they will have no qualms at all when the missiles take off, then, *it will be no mistake*."

What Merton adverts to is the universal failure of imagination—the apparent inability to conceive of what "the great festival of destruction" would mean. In a prophetic best seller of the fifties, Walter Miller's *Canticle of Leibowitz*—a book worth revisiting now—it is called the Flame Deluge. After the Flame Deluge in Miller's story, the world is left a barren desert where barbarians and monstrosities roam. Only after thirty-two generations does a kind of civilization emerge. And that civilization again begins to repeat the development of nuclear weapons.



"Don't be alarmed, folks—it's only a **tactical** *nuke."*

"Have we no choice but to play the Phoenix in an unending sequence of rise and fall? Are we doomed to it, Lord," asks the author in the foreword, "chained to the pendulum of our mad clockwork, helpless to halt its swing?" Miller calls his book "a cry for sanity in our silent night of madness."

It would seem that the only sensible answer to that cry is to respond now to the 1996 call of an international group of generals and admirals, including General Lee Butler, former head of the U.S. Strategic Command, and General Andrew Goodpaster, for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The members of the group came from the declared nuclear-weapons countries—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—from the emergent nuclear countries—India, Israel, and Pakistan—and the major non-nuclear powers—Germany and Japan.

Remember the stirring words of that December 5 statement: "We have been presented with a challenge of the highest possible historical importance: the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free world. All nations should move in concert toward the same goal. The end of the cold war makes it possible."

Distracted, we have let time slip by, but with our full attention and that of other nations we have to believe that nuclear abolition can be achieved. We can insist on the dismantling of existing weapons. We can work for a concerted international inspection program. Bruce Martin Russell, author of the hopeful article, "We Can End the Arms Race," in the same issue of the *Catholic Worker*, assures us that "in a world of spreading transparency no country could expect to produce...such weapons" against such a program. It is vital that we address this our most serious problem without delay. □

Edwin Xavier Travers

THE BOMB NEXT DOOR

On the scene in Nairobi

My wife and I had never heard a bomb go off before. So lying in bed at the Stanley Hotel in downtown Nairobi on the morning of August 7, completely exhausted from our eight-hour Paris-Nairobi trip, we were not quite sure what we heard. But we did feel the pressure from the blast, and knew that we were at least tangentially involved in something very different and very big.

Our worries were confirmed when we looked out the window of our third-floor room. We could see people running in one direction, then sharply turning and running in another, in crazy-quilt patterns. Cars came to a stop and drivers jumped out, trying to comprehend what had happened. As dust began to drift earthward from the bomb site, the sky over downtown Nairobi became very dark. Paper—even reams of computer paper—and other debris filled the air. And then rather suddenly the city streets, generally filled with teeming crowds at 10:45 in the morning, became deserted. Not a person or moving car could be seen. It was obvious that something terrible had happened.

We turned on the radio and tuned into KBS, the Kenyan

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Broadcasting System. The first reports said that a bomb had gone off in the American embassy, located at the intersection of Moi and Haile Selassie, the Fifth Avenue and Broadway of downtown Nairobi. That was a scant five-minute walk from our hotel. Within minutes local TV was announcing that a bomb had also just gone off at the American embassy in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Having been in Dar es Salaam just two years before, we had no trouble envisioning the scene there.

As has been widely reported, because of the vigilance of the security guards at the American embassy in Nairobi, the terrorists were forced to detonate the bomb in an alley between the embassy and the Unfundi Co-operative Building. Their goal had been to set off the massive explosive in the embassy's underground parking lot, as was done in the World Trade Center bombing in New York. Exploding the bomb on the street resulted in the deaths of at least 250 people, almost all of them Kenyans. The casualties were high because the parking lot of the Unfundi Co-operative was crowded with the *matatus*, or small buses, that bring thousands of people into Nairobi for work each day. They were innocent bystanders. It was impossible to understand how twisted minds could think that killing hundreds of Africans—and blinding hundreds more with flying glass—was a way to damage or get even with the United States.

Americans are used to ambulances and fire departments from many communities responding when disasters like fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes strike. Things are different in Kenya. It is hard to describe the chaos that engulfs a city poorly equipped to respond to such a catastrophic emergency. Instead of antiseptic ambulances, with IVs for the critically wounded, victims were transported in ancient taxis, stagecoach buses, the local bus service, in crowded *matatus*, and private cars. At the city's two hospitals, Kenyatta National and Nairobi, desperate attempts were made to save the injured, attempts made even more frustrating by the lack of equipment and lack of experience with such disasters.

By the afternoon, you could walk in downtown Nairobi, though the embassy area was restricted. Shattered glass was everywhere. Soon, however, plywood sheets were being used to board up blown-out windows in the Ambassador Hotel, adjacent to the embassy, and other buildings in the area.

Unfortunately, the United States response to the bombing was less than edifying. Kenyans were offended when the American ambassador characterized as "looters" the Kenyans who tried to save lives immediately after the blast. The State Department's warning to Americans not to travel to Kenya, though understandable, effectively aborted almost all tourism, Kenya's most profitable business. Although this warning was later reversed, editorials in the Kenyan papers made little effort to mask the anger of the Kenyan people. Nor, to be sure, did the Kenyans mask their anger toward Arab countries.

Given the logistical difficulties, it took awhile for the Americans to get rescue teams to Nairobi. Happily, the Israelis had their rescue team in place within three hours and were largely responsible for the early recovery of many of the Kenyans trapped in the Unfundi building.

Despite the pleading of the Kenyans for monetary assistance to help those who lost loved ones, there seems to be no great urgency on the part of the United States to offer, let alone give, assistance. The *East Africa Standard* expressed what seemed to be the common thought of the Kenyan people when Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Nairobi, almost two weeks after the blast. "Whereas the U.S.'s pledge of $2 million to whomever gives information leading to the arrest of those behind the twin bombings in Tanzania and Nairobi is commendable, more needs to be done by Washington to show that it shares the grief of Kenya and Tanzania."

The United States, it seems to me, owes some material assistance to the victims of these bombings. It is first, and foremost, our moral obligation. It would also be a sound political gesture. □

Edwin Xavier Travers, *a retired school teacher, lives in Clarksville, Maryland.*

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FALLOUT FROM THE CLINTON CAPERS

A bleak outlook for the Democrats

Wilson Carey McWilliams

The elections of 1998 look to be bad news for the Democrats and worse for the country.

Democratic prospects were never very good this year. Midterm elections historically are unkind to the party in power, especially a party like the Democrats whose low-income supporters are less likely to make it to the polls without the big stakes and bigger hype of a presidential contest. And this year, continuing to be lacerated by questions about their fund raising in 1996, Democrats have been painfully circumspect and much less successful. The Republican advantage in campaign funds, always substantial, has become startling. Even a major victory on the Democratic side has its irony: The unions, still the party's best donors, defeated a California ballot proposition that would have limited their ability to make political contributions, but in doing so, they spent millions of dollars that otherwise might have found their way into Democratic campaigns. The shortage of money has added to the Democrats' difficulty in persuading attractive potential candidates to run for office: In Colorado, for example, Representative David Skaggs not only declined to run for the Senate, but decided to retire from the House. Concentrating their resources on the competitive House races that might give them a majority—an outside chance at best—Democratic strategists effectively allowed dozens of Republican incumbents to be returned without opposition.

Here and there, Democrats can spot a glimmer. Gray Davis is doing well in the gubernatorial contest in California, and Democrats have a good shot at picking up three or four other governorships, as in Minnesota, where the party's nominee is the state's attorney general, Hubert Humphrey III. Recent polls give Senator Ernest Hollings a decent lead in South Carolina, Evan Bayh may pick up a Senate seat in Indiana, and Democrats cling, precariously, to their perennial hope of defeating Al D'Amato in New York. Republicans also obligingly nominated a number of more-or-less extreme right-wingers—Bob Dornan, seeking to return to Congress, may be the nuttiest—giving Democrats better chances than they would have enjoyed otherwise. In Illinois, for example, Peter Fitzgerald's victory in the G.O.P. primary rescued Carol Moseley-Braun from the list of dead ducks, although her campaign is still in the political ICU.

Wilson Carey McWilliams, *a longtime* Commonweal *contributor, teaches political science at Rutgers University.*

However, there aren't many grounds for Democratic optimism. In California, a Republican rightist, Darrel Issa, lost to Matt Fong, an appealing candidate who has Senator Barbara Boxer in serious trouble. Social conservatives are behaving with unwontedly good political sense, focusing on opposition to partial-birth abortions, where their position has overwhelming political support. Democrats, moreover, have their own cranks, like Geoffrey Fieger, their doomed candidate for governor in Michigan, while some Democratic centrists, like Jay Nixon, their nominee for the Senate in Missouri, have made black voters restless. Now, with the president's troubles, Republicans have reason to think that they can pick up ten or twelve seats in the House and three or four in the Senate, a splendid showing considering their party's lackluster congressional record.

Democrats will be entering the campaign demoralized and resentful, aware that the president's caperings and the Starr Report will dominate public discussion, and knowing that they have no really good way of responding. Some, of course, are talking about resignation or even impeachment, but most are likely to say that the president's conduct, while repellent, did not involve impeachable offenses, an argument that is at least defensible and is probably correct, as far as the Constitution is concerned. (The Constitution, after all, speaks of *high* crimes, not tacky ones.) Clinton's recent contrition helps; so does the fact that Starr's report is overtly partisan and fundamentally voyeuristic—the *New York Times*'s Maureen Dowd, no friend of Clinton's, called it "a Harold Robbins novel"— especially since Starr himself has rather less charm than the average gauleiter. Still, Democrats will be on the defensive and holding the moral low ground.

"As scoundrel to scroundel, what's your last refuge?"

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The president and his party are on terms of bare civility, united only by their enemies. A good many Democrats—leaders and citizens—feel betrayed, not because the president lied or because he did so with that quivering sincerity that is one of his trademarks, but because he lied so stupidly, telling flat untruths that always stood a good chance of being exposed. Machiavellians had better not bungle: those who admired Clinton's slickness and excused him for many faults when he euchred their enemies are not inclined to forgive his very public pratfall.

In any case, Bill Clinton has worn out his welcome among Democrats. *Newsweek* asked, "Can He Still Lead?," but for Democrats he was never much of a leader. His version of leadership is conciliatory—Clinton said he wanted, in his second term, to be a "repairer of the breach"—more suited to patching the old order than to changing it, championing consensus rather than party. "A political Typhoid Mary," Robert Kuttner writes, the president is devastating to his friends and allies. And for the foreseeable future, he will find it hard to appeal to the high road of moral suasion and principle without evoking snickers. Even on his own terms, he is pretty much a spent force, and Democrats have plenty of reasons to wish him gone.

Republicans, of course, have partisan reasons for glee, but the attack on the president is dangerous for them, too—John Czwartacki, one of Trent Lott's aides, called it "Kryptonite." Conservative zealots want the president's scalp (to say nothing of other body parts), and most partisan Republicans sympathize. Independent voters, by contrast, so far seem to think that while the president is a sleaze, he ought to stay in office, and Republicans have to conciliate their sensibilities. Especially, the G.O.P. cannot afford to look partisan or persecutory, and Republicans are lucky to have the House hearings chaired by the admirable Henry Hyde of Illinois. Republican strategic interests suggest leaving Mr. Clinton in office—why give Gore the present of incumbency?—and, despite promises of an expeditious impeachment process, they can be expected to keep that pot boiling, rhetorically, until after the election.

Meanwhile, Democrats and their allies are starting to retaliate by unmasking the seamy and steamy irregularities on the Republican side; Dan Burton's (R-Ind.) illegitimate child and Helen Chenoweth's (R-Idaho) affair, not to mention that of Congressman Hyde, are probably only the beginning. Republicans, of course, are sure to have a similar list of their own. The campaign of 1998, in short, bids to be a season of exceptional nastiness, adding to the public's already abundant disenchantment with our institutions and with democratic politics.

To most voters, there are no heroes in the story: disappointed or disgusted by the president, they despise his critics. In their view—partly distorted, but only that—our political leaders, beginning with Messrs. Clinton and Starr, are guilty of pettiness, letting themselves be governed by tawdry passions and schoolyard arrogance, all apotheosized by moralism and ideology. Meanwhile, great issues get neglected or ignored. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) complained recently that the president, distracted, has been able to offer only weak leadership in response to the global economic crisis; one imagines millions of voters responding, "And whose fault is that? A plague on both your houses." The greater number of Americans recognize that the wrangle in Washington is damaging not only the president but the presidency, and with it, the country. They want the whole shebang to go away. The voters, Boston University's Alan Wolfe writes, "are more in tune with *realpolitik* than the politicians."

In the short term, however, this rather evenly balanced public distaste works in favor of the Republicans. In the first place, it will help keep turnout down on election day. And second, it reinforces distrust of government, no bad thing for most Republicans, but a blow to Democrats as the party of the state.

From a Democratic viewpoint, the focus on the president's wrongdoings is doubly unfortunate, partly because the party is tainted by its association with him, but more importantly because it takes attention away from what is otherwise a very strong Democratic case. With few exceptions, this has been a do-nothing Congress: In the most obvious omission, Republican majorities have failed to move forward on campaign finance reform, an issue manifestly central to the future of democratic politics. The G.O.P. promise to cut taxes, moreover, seems less compelling this year. For all their ideological suspicion of government in the abstract, voters continue to express a desire for government programs and protections—for better education, for the regulation of HMOs, and for policies to afford a measure of economic security. The stock market's recent case of the vapors has muted the chorus calling for the privatization of Social Security. And in the same sense, the global economic crisis dramatically reflects the inadequacy of unregulated markets and the need for public intervention in the interest of home, work, and social order. As Paul Lewis writes, Karl Marx, wrong about socialism, looks increasingly prescient as a student of capitalism, and even Francis Fukuyama has acknowledged doubts about "the end of history." A campaign debate concerned with matters other than phone sex and thong underwear might find time to challenge America's increasingly harsh class structure, its towering inequality of respect, and the looming resentment that stalks both. That sort of public discussion, however, will have to wait for another time.

Bill Clinton is a survivor and he will probably remain in office. It is just possible that his humbling will give new depth and seriousness to his soul—that, "broken in spirit," as he said on September 11, he will be strong of heart. But that's a very long shot, and not worth risking the rent money. "We force the spring," Clinton said in his 1993 inaugural; in 1998, we will probably settle for surviving the winter. □

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A CALCULUS OF NEED

Funding AIDS research & care

Robert M. Byrn

When a large, cohesive, well-connected activist group decides to embrace a cause, the sociopolitical status of the cause changes. Funds are raised; the media take notice; the public reacts; politicians listen. Witness AIDS and breast cancer. Red and pink ribbons are *de rigueur*, feature stories are common, and with greater-than-usual ceremony, private industry pledges support and politicians announce new funding for research, treatment, and care.

Although AIDS and breast cancer share a spotlight, the reaction of a large segment of the public to those who suffer from the diseases is quite different. To many Americans, people with AIDS (PWAs) personify the degenerate state of society; yet care for PWAs is supported by public funds. Even some sympathetic individuals have become uncomfortable with what they now see as a disproportion in the financial support available to PWAs. There are rumblings of a reaction against the intense public focus on AIDS. (None of this is true of breast cancer.)

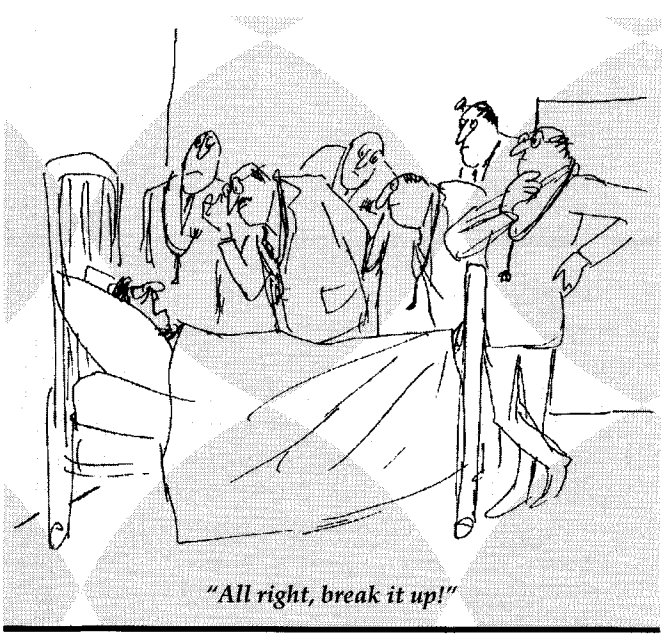
Perhaps perceiving an imminent reversal of fortune, individual AIDS advocacy groups, with divergent agendas, have begun to compete with each other for bigger slices of the funding pie. Last year, for example, Martin Delaney, a California AIDS activist, was quoted in the *New York Times* (November 12, 1997) condemning the "exceptional" status claimed for AIDS: "Why do people with AIDS get funding for primary medical care? There are certainly other life-threatening diseases out there. Some of them kill a lot more people than AIDS does." Delaney favored replacing separate programs for AIDS with a national (universal) health-care system. But in the meanwhile, he seriously challenged the morality of a public policy that gives special attention to AIDS, a challenge that questions the validity of at least some AIDS programs, regardless of the availability of a substitute system.

A second *Times* article ("New Studies Offer Hope and Caution on AIDS Therapies," November 14, 1997) highlighted new medications that seem to have turned AIDS from an inevitably fatal affliction to a manageable chronic disease. More recently, another *Times* article ("Wave of Laws Aimed at People with H.I.V.," September 25, 1998) noted a "backlash" among legislators across the country who have come to believe that "we have been soft on the epidemic" and that society now needs "to get tough on people with AIDS." One way of getting tough is to cut funding.

People who write about AIDS ought to begin by revealing their own qualifications, biases, and potentially gored oxen. Herewith the relevant facts of my own situation: I am neither HIV positive (the precursor of AIDS) nor a member of any HIV risk group. On the other hand, within the past year I have undergone treatments for another deadly disease—prostate cancer. My medical condition apart, my strong and frequently expressed public opposition to legalized abortion, euthanasia, and homosexual practices makes me an avowed moral conservative. So conventional wisdom would seem to put me in sympathy with arguments that favor eliminating support for PWAs. I am not.

Although I do not have AIDS, it has become a significant part of my life. I volunteer on the AIDS ward of two hospitals. Frequently, the hospital visits lead to follow-up visits to nursing homes. I now spend parts of at least three and as many as six days a week with AIDS patients. I have been doing this for more than three years. During that time, I have lost to the disease people whom I truly came to care about—and grieve for. Few volunteers are able to avoid such emotional involvement. With all this baggage in hand, let me now offer a few comments.

- *First:* Besides AIDS, another dangerous virus plagues



"All right, break it up!"

Robert M. Byrn, *professor emeritus, held the Leonard F. Manning Distinguished Professorship at the Fordham University School of Law.*

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Egyptian Interval

"Kiss," said the camel driver,
and the camel, from its lordly height,
bent its head, and briefly nuzzled
that grizzled proffered cheek.

I thought of a royal gesture long ago,
when the King of Spain
sent the English King
a gift of five camels,
and with them,
a note of instruction:
they were to graze
in the park each day,
but must be returned by evening
so as to protect them
from the "vulgar gaze."

I thought too of an Arab
who had said
a man knows his camel
as he knows his wife—
can recognize these contours
at a distance,
even when no more than a dark shape
silhouetted by the setting sun.

"Kiss," said the driver once again.
And as the camel that he knew
as he knew his wife,
bent down to oblige,
I turned away
to screen a shared moment
between man and beast
from an unwanted,
and even what might seem to them,
a "vulgar gaze."

E.B. de Vito

the land. Those whom it infects teach that because some people have advantages that the rest don't, no one should have them. In context, it translates: We spend more on AIDS than on some other deadly diseases; therefore, spend less on AIDS!

Even my disease is a bigger killer than AIDS. Prostate cancer kills forty thousand men every year in the United States. Currently, these deaths exceed deaths from AIDS by more than a third. Should I now lobby for less money for AIDS? Were I to do so, then according to the principles of traditional Roman Catholicism to which I subscribe, I would be guilty of the capital sin of envy, which "wishes grave harm to a neighbor [on account of] displeasure caused by his prosperity" (*see* the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). But then one need not be a Catholic to recognize how mortally and morally perverse this political virus really is.

Of course, not everyone who argues for reductions in AIDS funding and programs is ill-motivated. Some genuinely believe that the money may better be spent elsewhere for what they perceive to be a greater need. But anyone familiar with welfare programs knows that things don't work that way. Money cut from a program typically is not diverted elsewhere. It simply becomes a politically advantageous "cut in spending." Even if it were diverted, it would more likely follow greater influence than greater need. Besides, a triage system of funding would not seem to be a salutary approach to conquering deadly diseases.

Also to be distinguished from the envious are those who advocate a national health-care system that would fairly and adequately encompass all diseases. Whether or not such a system is feasible or desirable is not at issue here. What is at issue is the cynicism of those who campaign for it by creating resentment against special programs for PWAs. They may not be among the envious, but they feed the envy of others.

- *Second:* If, as some say, AIDS is not "exceptional," it is at least different. AIDS is a virus, an infectious plague. (I did not "catch" prostate cancer.) Viral plagues require focused attention because viruses have a way of circumventing the defenses we erect against them. And AIDS is particularly complex. I may die of metastasizing cancer. PWAs do not die of AIDS; they die of one or more of the twenty-six opportunistic diseases—ranging from cancer to pneumonia to multidrug-resistant TB—that take advantage of damaged immune systems. And those who die are young. In 1995, two-thirds of those who died of AIDS-related infections were under forty years of age. Ninety percent were under fifty. AIDS infections kill more African-Americans between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four than any other disease.
- *Third:* Families and friends typically rally around people with conventional diseases. They often abandon PWAs. Many in society stigmatize AIDS patients, a number of whom react with feelings of guilt. The subverted self-esteem, isolation, and depression of many PWAs may be as much a part of AIDS as the lymphomas that kill so many of them. These patients, together with the homeless for whom AIDS is a particular problem, require special support services.

Of course, it is possible to argue that PWAs do not deserve support because all but a small percentage of them have become infected through immoral conduct, usually by sharing a contaminated needle to inject an illegal drug or by engaging in illicit sexual activity with someone who is already infected. This identifies the sinner with the sin. But here the bishops of the United States, in their 1981 statement on health and health care, and Pope John Paul II, in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, make relevant observations. According to the bishops: "[Jesus] relieved suffering and 'cured all who were afflicted' (Matt. 8:16). He demonstrated that illness could

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be an occasion to prove God's love for his people *and not the sin of punishment*" [italics mine]. The pope specifically mentions "relief centers for AIDS patients" as one of the "eloquent expressions of what charity is able to devise in order to give everyone new reasons for hope and practical possibilities for life." Nowhere in the Gospels is there a record of Jesus having conditioned a cure upon the cause of the illness.

- *Fourth:* It is true that the new medications have effected an overall decrease in AIDS deaths, but PWAs are still dying, and the rate of infection—which is hightest among minority groups—has not decreased significantly. (The fear is that as infections and deaths decrease among the white middle class, PWAs will lose their strongest advocates.) More than 50 percent of PWAs are resistant to the new life-extending medications. This figure includes not only people whose resistance was built up by older medications, but also those who were never warned that the virus would learn to resist the new medications if there were a substantial interruption in taking them—because no one knew of that problem. It also includes street people who cannot or will not maintain a medication regimen that may require taking more than twenty pills every day, at rigidly set intervals, and other pills and/or IV infusions at other times during the week. My own and others' admittedly anecdotal experiences seem to indicate that there has been a recent increase in deaths among long-term patients who fall into the medication-resistant groups. The larger number of PWAs remain in peril.

That peril would seem to render irrelevant the objection that the special funding/publicity status of AIDS is primarily the result of organized pressure. True as that may be, it pales into insignificance in the face of the real and urgent needs of the imperiled—needs that would not be met except for the special funding/publicity status of AIDS.

Even those who are now benefiting from the new medications continue to need financial assistance and moral support. Unless cheaper medications are developed, these people face a lifetime of exorbitantly expensive treatment. Many remain disabled by long-term, chronic infections that the new medications have not helped to cure. Likewise, the medications do not cure the isolation and depression characteristic of the lives of so many PWAs.

- *Finally:* I can hardly claim to be anything special, either as a volunteer on the AIDS wards (many others do far more than I) or as a veteran of prostate cancer (many others have far worse prognoses than I). I want a cure for prostate cancer; I don't want to die of it. I want a cure for AIDS; I don't want people to die of AIDS infections. Those who would turn us against each other in pursuit of some other agenda are wrong. Not only do they fail to serve us and all the diseased, they also undermine the determination of a nation to see to it that cure and care are somehow available where cure and care are needed. Resentment, envy, and cynicism divide; they do not conquer. Downsizing assistance will hurt PWAs; it will help no one. □

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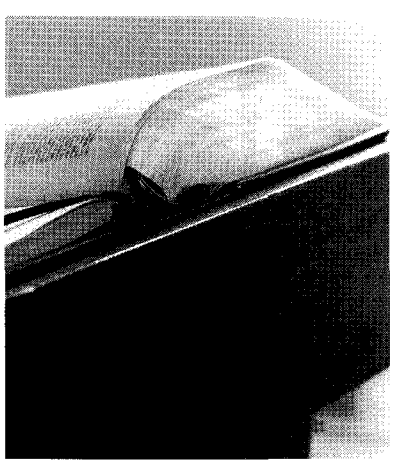

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Celia Wren

AWASH IN PUPPETEERS

Henson Festival & 'Symphonie Fantastique'

"Do away with the actor," proclaimed the theatrical innovator Gordon Craig in the early years of this century, "and you do away with the means by which a debased stage realism is produced and flourishes." Then, in a passage that has given the creeps to drama students ever since, he went on to demonstrate the inferiority of human actors to puppets, "descendants of a great and noble family of images, images which were made in the likeness of God."

In a country where most of us associate puppetry first and foremost with Kermit the frog, the art form holds less exalted status, and puppets can seem childish—modified toys. But other cultures boast richer traditions, and artists all over the world are creating adventurous works using puppets—with and without the help of human actors.

The vibrancy of this work was splendidly showcased in New York this September when the Jim Henson Foundation sponsored its biannual International Festival of Puppet Theater. The Henson Foundation, founded by Muppet creator Jim Henson, exists to promote puppetry in the United States. To this end, it makes grants to artists, and every other year sponsors the festival, which includes international acts primarily for adults. This year's smorgasbord, representing sixteen countries, included pieces as diverse as a multimedia dramatization of William Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*, a meditation on South Africa's post-apartheid Truth Commission, and a contemporary tribute to the ancient Indonesian art of shadow plays.

Most of these works ventured into experimental territory, but one entry did represent a more conservative strain. Making its U. S. debut, the Japanese company Youki-za, which was founded in 1635, illustrated the elaborate and highly stylized traditional Japanese art of marionettes. Youki-za performed three pieces, including the operatic *Meiboku Sendai Hagi: Tale of the Loyalty of Goten Masaoka*, a play often staged in kabuki theater. Wearing black, with black veils wrapped around their heads, the puppeteers coaxed six-inch marionettes, clad in elaborate silk costumes, through a tale of murder and betrayal during the reign of a shogun. Humor glinted here and there through the solemnity: during an impressive battle scene, a samurai's weapon sliced a warrior clean in half, and the two halves hopped awkwardly off into the wings.

Quite different in tone and scale was *Lion Dance*, a wordless selection that featured a twelve-inch dragon with a gold head, white whiskers, and a turquoise silk coat. With Youki-za patriarch Magosaburo Youki XII guiding the strings, the puppet pranced on stage and cavorted, scratching its ear with its hind foot like a cat, biting its tail, and snapping at butterflies, to the audience's amusement.

Moments like these draw attention to the contradiction that puppets embody: they are simultaneously animate and artificial. A marionette dragon is marvelous to watch because it moves as if it were living, but we still laugh when it scratches its ear—because it is funny to watch something *not* alive act as if it were. Sigmund Freud observed that the presence of the familiar within the strange, the hint that the inanimate is living, creates the "uncanny." The word usually implies something frightening, but Freud's observation helps explain why puppets can be so droll, as well as so eerie.

The spookier side of puppets was on display in a particularly provocative festival selection, created by the celebrated puppet artist Roman Paska. *Dieu! God Mother Radio* splices an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's 1589 play *The Massacre at Paris* with a disquieting vision of a cosmic radio station. The puppeteer Massimo Schuster, looking like a mad monk with his wild beard and long white robe, roamed up and down two racks of marionettes, which he periodically seized, toyed with, and replaced. Behind him, a glass-topped booth resembled the control room of a radio engineer.

In the play's central conceit, Schuster depicted a radio deejay coordinating coverage of Catholic/Protestant conflict in sixteenth-century France ("Over to our special correspondent, Christopher Marlowe..."). The marionettes stood in for people caught in the turmoil, but because the figures were so tiny in comparison to the stark, black stage, pathos relied almost entirely on the audience's imagination. Every moment in the seventy-minute production, in fact, seemed to create huge gaps for the human mind to bridge.

The play's unnerving central motif was the metaphor of God as puppeteer. The image of the radio studio—a room sealed off from the outside world—made the deejay's implied manipulation of that outside world all the more sinister. Can we hold God responsible for tragedy and evil? Do we have free will? Can we trust our own perspective on anything? *Dieu! God Mother Radio* forced viewers to confront these questions. In the rows of inert marionettes, the audience had to glimpse itself.

An equally bizarre but much less successful festival offering touched on some of the same themes. *Salomé*, by the Stuffed Puppet Theatre of the Netherlands, toyed with the Oscar Wilde play, while introducing contemporary sex and violence, presumably for added relevance. Whereas a unified aesthetic governed *Dieu! God Mother Radio*, *Salomé* jolted uneasily from one plane to another. The five-foot puppets—Salomé in a purple halter top and sequined skirt,

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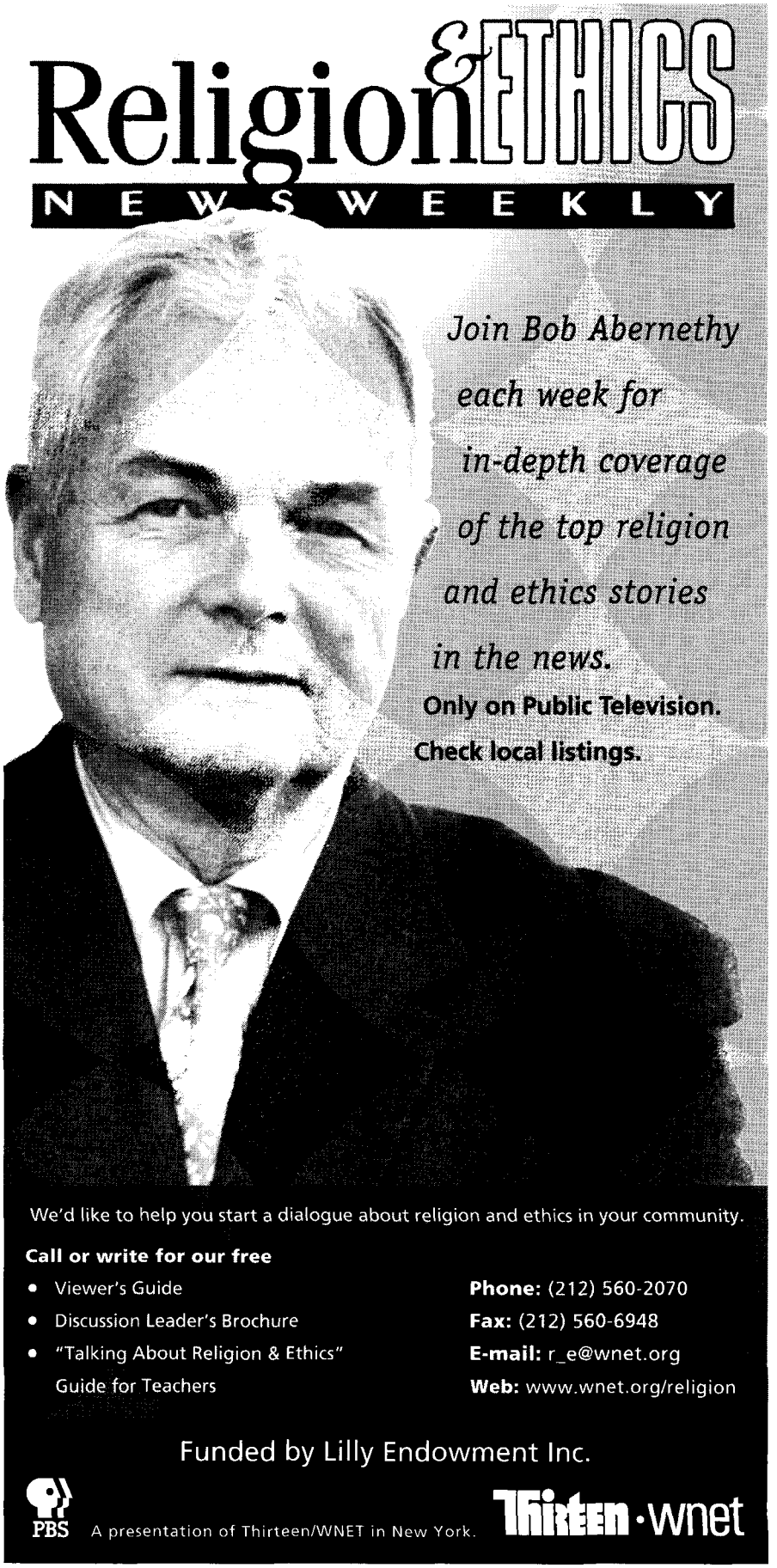
Herod with a pale blue beard and demonic red eyes—were stunning. But a subplot involving a lecherous modern criminal, and a coy soundtrack (techno-rap, a song from *Gigi*), seemed arbitrary, an instance of writer/director Luk van Meerbeke indulging himself.

Even so, the work had its moments. "For 2000 years I've been getting the blame for everything," Salomé complained to the puppeteer (Neville Tranter), demanding that he put her out of her misery. By choosing annihilation, the puppet seemed to try to demonstrate its free will. The play seemed to zoom from biblical lands to Wilde's England, to 1990s New York and the no-man's land of metatheater, making context as unstable as an optical illusion.

Salomé earned "Adults Only" billing, but for the most daring puppetry, you had to go outside the Henson festival. Over the summer, a puppet show that was *entirely abstract* stunned New York. At the ultra-hip HERE performance space, puppeteer Basil Twist sets fabrics and cut-outs swirling through a 500-gallon tank of water, in a hallucinatory interpretation of Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*.

The effect is beautiful and a little unnerving, as if an aquarium had mated with a lava lamp. Plumes glide and sway like a *corps de ballet*; cloths undulate like flames, or wings, or jellyfish. Even with these echoes of the animate, though, it isn't easy to concentrate on abstractions for an hour; familiarity with the music enhances the experience, the gothic story Berlioz devised as back-up for the symphony lending a little narrative energy. At the last movement's conclusion, Twist and his five assistants trudge out for a bow onstage, utterly drenched—no one ever said the *avant garde* was easy.

Ultimately, perhaps, Twist's concept is better than the show itself. But the concept is brilliant, and the production certainly deserves to be the off-Broadway sensation critics have made it. *Symphonie Fantastique*, by the way, is supported in part by the Jim Henson Foundation. It's a long, long way from Sesame Street. □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Frank McConnell

LET'S DANCE

The democracy of 'Swing'

Between 1935—the year of Benny Goodman's first, extraordinary triumph—and 1950—when Dizzy Gillespie decided to hang it up with his first, legendary big band—something unique happened: America became, for a while, "America." The republic, that is, actually lived up to its dream of itself. But no; that's too much. The republic, for all its deep scars of racism, economic inequity, and crass commercialism, really believed that it *might* live up to the dream. A generously multiracial culture; a capitalist/collectivist society allowing each person adequate freedom of the self; and a nation of noble, triumphant populists: these ideas were a heady drug to Walt Whitman in the 1850s, and in the 1990s sound like the clichés of our discredited (and which of them is not?) leaders. But once—honest, folks!—people *really thought it was going to happen.*

Now, historian Lewis Erenberg has written a wonderful book, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (University of Chicago Press, $28, 320 pp.), that indicates how much of "what was about to happen" was incarnated in the structure and culture of the great swing bands.

First of all, "swing" democratized jazz. Regarded during the twenties mainly as the music of urban blacks and the wealthy white elite—those who could afford taxis to Harlem—in the thirties, swing became what critic James Lincoln Collier calls, "The American Theme Song." Goodman's theme song, as everybody ought to know, was "Let's Dance," and the subjunctive, "Let's," is what the tune and the time was all about: Everybody could, was invited to, get up and dance, jitterbug, lindy-hop to the music in a pseudo-ecstatic (or ecstatic) celebration.

But celebration of *what*? Well, as Whitman writes in the very first poem in *Leaves of Grass*, "One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." Erenberg doesn't cite Whitman, but that's the gravamen of his case, anyway. The essential structure of swing music—ensemble passages punctuated with solo improvisation—is a paradigm of democracy, at least in its New Deal incarnation. I can never listen to Goodman or Artie Shaw or Count Basie without thinking of the WPA, Steinbeck, and the immense, *willed* optimism of those just-before-I-was-born years.

And Erenberg is splendid on the subject of the political self-consciousness of big-band jazz during its heyday. Swing "has the spirit of American democracy in it," Goodman said at the music's floodtide. The major jazz critics and promoters of the era, Leonard Feather, Barry Ulanov, and especially the enormously influential John Hammond, who "discovered" Goodman, Lionel Hampton *und so weiter*, and decades later the young Bob Dylan, were all what George Bush would call "card-carrying liberals." Their passion was for the music, but also for the music's symbolic valence as an instrument and metaphor for social change. The big bands "integrated" more than a decade before professional baseball did, and most of the musicians and the critics—even the regally aloof Ellington—at one point or another got involved with the socialist/democratic Popular Front. And some—like Artie Shaw—would pay for that involvement during the looney-tune days of Joe McCarthy and the Red Scare.

But after WWII the kids who had jitterbugged in the '30s and killed guys in the '40s, came home, and their priorities were to marry Sue-Ellen and raise a family, not to mosey down to the malt shop for another listen to Glenn Miller's "In the Mood." And the black kids who came back, who thought they'd found the way to end discrimination (swing had been integrationist, sure, but only on whitey's terms), found that they still had to use separate drinking fountains, separate johns. And there was a new music, played by blacks for blacks, difficult and brilliant and nonorchestral and stunning, and it was called bebop. *And*—how many "ands" does it take?—the Congress of the United States was seriously—seriously!—concerned with the jazz music business as a possibly hidden bulwark of Communist infiltration into American society. The players all smoked dope, don't you know? (Well, yes, they did.) In other words, a combination of societal anxiety, political paranoia, and artistic evolution combined to wreck the idyll that had been the big band age.

And the big bands died.

Oh, Basie, Ellington, and Goodman survived, in their ways, and so did the splendid Woody Herman and the problematic Stan Kenton: but only after a fashion. The intimate relationship between performers and audience that had existed before the war was, in various ways broken, never to be mended. The early fifties were probably the most insipid years in the history of American pop, begging for the revolution that was rock and roll. But rock, for all its brilliance, was the institutionalization of anarchy—rebels without a cause—not of the benevolent, cheerful socialism of the age of swing.

I've been a big fan of Erenberg since his first book, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930*, appeared in 1981. He's a historian of popular culture who is also a historian, and a splendid one, of the national self-image. With *Swingin' the Dream* he extends his history of the way we play (and therefore the way we are) another twenty eventful years. I can only hope this sensitive and articulate scholar decides to continue his exploration into the age of Elvis and beyond. □

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A preacher's son

Early Novels and Stories
James Baldwin
The Library of America, $35, 970 pp.

Collected Essays
James Baldwin
The Library of America, $35, 869 pp.

Don Wycliff

It would be impossible to overstate what James Baldwin meant to me as a young man, a black student in a predominantly white college, in the mid- to late 1960s. Whether or not one agreed with what he was saying at any particular moment, his intelligence was luminous, too obvious to be questioned or doubted. His prose projected a ferocious self-assurance that I could only wish I possessed. Best of all, he was a manifestly successful writer, a genuine stylist of the American language, and his success gave the lie to any who might be inclined to question the ability of a black man to write.

Going back after thirty years and reading some of Baldwin's best-known works produced a surprise for me, however. All of the phrases and passages that I had found most memorable, the ones that had stuck in my mind over the years because they expressed so aptly and powerfully a thought that I knew in my mind and heart to be true—all of those were from his essays. None was from a novel or a short story. Indeed, until I went back and reread *Another Country* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, I could not recall, except in the sketchiest way, the plot of either. That's far different from the other fiction that I encountered at the same time and that became formative for me—works like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Albert Camus's *The Fall*, or almost any of François Mauriac's novels. It's different even from works that I have come to admire in my adulthood, like Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

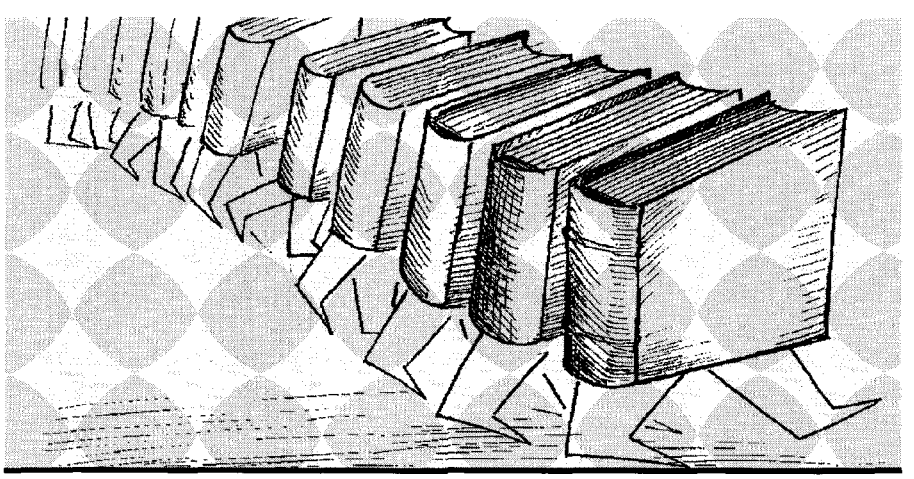
What all this says to me is that Baldwin was a brilliant essayist, and something less than a brilliant novelist. Which is not to say that he was a negligible novelist. Obviously not. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was among the hundred best works of twentieth-century English-language fiction named recently by that Random House-Modern Library panel. It must have something to recommend it to have won the endorsement of that club of old fuddy-duddies. But whether brilliant or merely good, Baldwin's fiction, along with his essays, deserves the honor of inclusion in The Library of America. Not to have included it would have been to devalue the entire enterprise, since Baldwin clearly was a very important American novelist.

But it was his essays that stuck to my ribs. Many of them—the best of them—still do. Despite such (now) strange-sounding locutions as "the Negro" and "the Negro problem," Baldwin's prose still has punch, has style, has eloquence. And while many of his observations seem dated, many still ring authentic and accurate.

In the introductory piece in "Notes of a Native Son," which Toni Morrison chose to open the volume of essays, Baldwin observed that, at age twenty-four, after two years of supporting himself by waiting on tables and writing book reviews "about the Negro problem, concerning which the color of my skin made me automatically an expert," he gave up writing such reviews.

But Baldwin never gave up writing about the issue of race, which was (and is) to say, about the relationship in American society between black people and white people. He couldn't have. It was what he knew about, and as he stated so very forcefully in that same introductory piece: "One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience."

Baldwin's experience was that of a black man trying to find meaning and success and identity in apartheid America. Being black—or Negro, in the vernacular of the time—was a crucial fact of life. So even when he wrote about other things—his strained relationship



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with his father was a theme in many essays—he wrote about race: His father was the man that he was because he was a black man in a white society; Baldwin related to his father as he did in part because of the influence of white society on him and them; Baldwin ultimately came to appreciate the older man and some of the lessons he had tried to impart about living as a black man in a white society.

It will always be hard for white Americans—and may be now for some African-Americans—to appreciate how overwhelming and oppressive to black people were white people and the structures of segregation they imposed in those preliberation days. Where one lived, worked, traveled, socialized, was educated, sought entertainment, was treated for illness—all that and more—was determined by white society. It was, quite literally, a totalitarian kind of oppression.

It was for that reason that one particular passage resonated with me when I first read it thirty-some years ago in "The Fire Next Time," and resonates still: "Perhaps we were, all of us—pimps, whores, racketeers, church members, and children—bound together by the nature of our oppression, the specific and peculiar complex of risks we had to run; if so, within these limits we sometimes achieved with each other a freedom that was close to love. I remember, anyway, church suppers and outings, and, later, after I left the church, rent and waistline parties where rage and sorrow sat in the darkness and did not stir, and we ate and drank and talked and laughed and danced and forgot all about 'the man.' We had the liquor, the chicken, the music, and each other, and had no need to pretend to be what we were not."

Ah, such rare, sweet moments of freedom!

Without question, I believe, "The Fire Next Time" is Baldwin's greatest piece of writing. It shows him at his best and most eloquent, as in the passage above, and at his worst and most foolish ("If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.")

It shows him gullible and naïve, as in his description of Elijah Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, during a visit by Baldwin to Muhammad's Chicago home in the early 1960s: "He teased the women, like a father, with no hint of that ugly and unctuous flirtatiousness I knew so well from other churches, and they responded like that, with great freedom and yet from a great and loving distance." How embarrassing that must have been after the disclosure, by Malcolm X and others, of Muhammad's promiscuity and his taking advantage of his female disciples.

It shows him wise and insightful, as in his lengthy discussion of the moral and psychological struggle that white Americans had to wage within themselves in order to confront the imperative of black liberation.

Ultimately, what "The Fire Next Time" shows is James Baldwin as preacher. He was a preacher's son who became, in his youth, a preacher. And while he later left the church, he remained, at heart, a preacher. His subject was America's race problem ("the Negro problem") and his medium was the written word. But always, whether in novel or essay, Baldwin was preaching a sermon. □

Don Wycliff *is editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

STRAYING CLOSE TO HOME

Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief
by Roger Lundin
William B. Eerdmans, $24, $16 paper, 305 pp.

David Yezzi

What were Emily Dickinson's religious beliefs? The matter resists illumination as thoroughly as any aspect of her famously tenebrous career. Yet, given the housebound poet's hymnal meters, her biblical references, clipped Calvinist idiom, and enduring preoccupation with God, Jesus, suffering, death, and (her "Flood subject") immortality, the question persists: To what extent did Dickinson espouse the Congregationalist faith of her family and of her community in Amherst, Massachusetts, in the middle nineteenth century? With *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*, Roger Lundin seeks to locate the spiritual concerns underlying a life and art seldom marked by biographical or critical consensus.

In fact, it seems that where Emily Dickinson (1830–86) is concerned, no two critics can agree on much. So, too, with regard to her spirituality. There are those writers, for example, who doubt that Dickinson's religious beliefs bear greatly on her poetry; others assert that she rejected religion outright, while still others feel poetry itself "became her religion." The critic Dennis Donoghue has aptly observed that "of her religious faith virtually anything may be said, with some show of evidence. She may be represented as an agnostic, a heretic, a sceptic, a Christian." Donoghue himself perhaps oversteps, however, when he argues that "Dickinson's Christianity was never a firm conviction." Her own words at the age of fifteen would seem to refute this. "I never enjoyed such perfect peace and happiness," she wrote to a friend, "as the short time in which I felt I had found my savior. . . . I feel I shall never be happy without I love Christ."

Such happiness proved elusive. The joy that Dickinson took in faith at that early age gave way in young adulthood to doubt, which her poems later absorbed as ambiguity and contradiction. As Lundin's efforts attest, little in the life provides conclusive answers (and,

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in this regard, Lundin is justly cautious, dispelling earlier misconceptions rather than fostering them or perpetrating additional ones). Of some things, we may be certain. In 1847–48, Dickinson underwent a year of religious instruction at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, but returned to Amherst after suffering an illness that gave the family cause to wish her home. (Home was, in fact, where Dickinson preferred to be her whole life; she regularly avoided travel and, in the end, almost never left her father's grounds.) Raised during the period of New England revivalism, Dickinson declined to make the public confession of faith that would admit her to the church (her father made his twice), and by the age of thirty she left off attending services altogether. Still, it is the critic J. V. Cunningham's contention that losing the call to salvation was the great disappointment of the poet's life.

Despite her failure to convert, Dickinson often returned in her writing to ideas of divinity. Both her more than one thousand surviving letters and her 1,775 poems contain wildly disparate views of deity; hers was "that religion/that doubts as fervently as it believes." In her years of greatest productivity—roughly the period of the Civil War, during which she wrote some thousand poems—God was portrayed as alternately salvific and distant. In one poem, dated *circa* 1864, Dickinson imagines herself as a bride of Christ:

> Given in Marriage unto Thee
> Oh thou Celestial Host—
> Bride of the Father and the Son
> Bride of the Holy Ghost.
> Other Betrothal shall dissolve—
> Wedlock of Will, decay—
> Only the Keeper of this Ring
> Conquer Mortality—

(If, in the end, she was not Christ's bride, she was no man's either: the death in 1884 of Otis Phillips Lord cruelly removed her one prospect for human marriage.) More often the poems suggest a God passively listening ("Of course—I prayed—/And did God Care?) or altogether absent ("They went to God's Right Hand—/That Hand is amputated now/And God cannot be found—"). Her conflicting views of the divine existed simultaneously and unresolved in her long struggle with faith (a "Pugilist and Poet," she termed herself). Yet doubt can be a form of belief, as the poets and ministers John Donne and George Herbert knew. If her relationship to God defies easy characterization, it is nonetheless everywhere in evidence.

Working back from the letters and poems, Lundin's biography attempts to place Dickinson in the context of the religion of her time and place, of which there are four standard views: staunch moral Puritanism, Whiggish cultural Protestantism (with a side of Transcendentalism), Darwinian naturalism, and Nietzschean post-Christianity. It is true that Dickinson's life spanned this drastic shift from a religious to a secular society, but a Nietzschean she was not. As Lundin points out, "Unlike Nietzsche, she was not gleeful about the possible loss of God but profoundly sad about it, because 'The abdication of Belief/Makes the Behavior small—.'" Also to her credit, there was perhaps something of Dickinson's Puritan inheritance that led her to perceive the limits of Romantic optimism found in the work of her contemporaries Emerson and Whitman, yet, like them, she refused to accept the notion of Original Sin. As Lundin puts it, "God may know why we need to be forgiven, but 'The Crime, from us, is hidden—.'"

Such seeming paradoxes as those that clung to Dickinson's spiritual beliefs frustrate uniform understanding. While ambiguities may prove the biographer's bane, they should not snaffle the efforts of literary critics. Readers of Dickinson would do well to remember that, whether or not she was as Lundin suggests "one of the major religious thinkers of her age," she was first and foremost a poet. For such creatures and their creations a reasonable level of ambiguity must be allowed, if not held as an ideal. It is in this regard that one wishes Lundin were more adept at bringing singly to life the startling oddity, invention, and complexities of the poems. Often difficult, they may open up through careful elucidation and patient reading. Such effort is hardly a chore, given that Dickinson may well be the finest lyric poet America has yet produced—a fact that Lundin's learned and clear-sighted study gives us further reason to know. □

David Yezzi *is a Stegner fellow at Stanford University.*

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WRESTLING WITH INFINITY

Belief in God in an Age of Science
John Polkinghorne
Yale University Press, $18, 160 pp.

Ernan McMullin

John Polkinghorne has been one of the most effective contributors in recent years to the rapidly growing literature of the domain where science and religion meet. Professor of theoretical physics at Cambridge University before he resigned to study theology and to be ordained an Anglican priest, he carries on a great Anglican tradition that goes back to such luminaries as Robert Boyle and John Ray in the seventeenth century, and that has been carried on so ably by Polkinghorne's immediate predecessors like Eric Mascall. His writing is informed equally by his expertise in the demanding field of theoretical physics and by his deep Christian faith. Where recent physics offers options to its interpreters, he seeks out the one (if any) that sees traces of God's action everywhere in the created order. Likewise, where Christian theology appears to carry implications for the understanding of the physical world, Polkinghorne sometimes draws on his own skilled understanding of that world to shape the relevant theological doctrine in subtle and occasionally far-reaching ways.

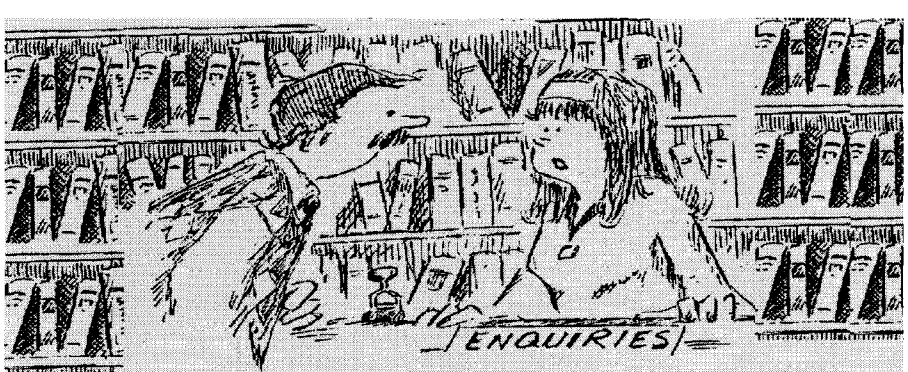
The present work represents the 1996 Terry Lectures on Religion in the Light of Science and Philosophy, delivered at Yale University. Polkinghorne took this opportunity to draw together themes from his earlier works in order to sketch in broad outline his own vision of a natural theology informed by contemporary physical science. The mathematical simplicity of the physicist's world, endowed as it is "with a transparent rational beauty," shows the unmistakable hand of a Creator. The four fundamental forces that make the stable complexities of the physical world possible relate to one another in such delicate balance that were their relative strengths to be ever so slightly different, the universe would not be able to develop within itself complex forms of life. Does not this testify, he asks, to a purposive choice on the part of a Creator?

Recent advances in physics, he argues, have broken the hold of both the determinism and the strong forms of reductionism associated with the Newtonian tradition. One of his most distinctive theses is that the resulting "openness" of causal texture allows God to exercise a form of providential action within physical process, a communication of "information," as it were, without any corresponding alteration in energy that could violate accepted conservation laws. Unlike some others who have explored this theme, Polkinghorne realizes the dangers of using the "openness" associated with quantum interaction as a vehicle for the Creator's "special" action. Instead, he focuses on chaos theory, arguing that "epistemological uncertainties become an ontological openness" that might permit one to understand not only the holistic character of human willed action, but also how God may act in a directive way to "steer" physical process according to his providential ends.

Another distinctive thesis is that the Creator must be viewed as a *temporal* Being, from one fundamental perspective at least. Only in this way could God truly *know* events that are themselves temporal. The classical Augustinian doctrine of God as atemporal is associated in Polkinghorne's mind with the "block universe" model, adopted by some influential interpreters of relativity theory, which he regards as erroneous. In his view, the notion of time consonant with contemporary physics suggests that the Creator "does not yet know the unformed future, and interacts with history as it unfolds," constantly "improvising" in response to unanticipated outcomes.

Polkinghorne draws a strong analogy between natural science and theology as modes of discovering truth. He compares the fundamental transformation of physics in the first decades of the past century to the development of theological doctrine in the first centuries of the Christian era. There is much in common, epistemologically speaking, he argues, between the two sequences: moments of radical revision; periods of tension, even confusion; appearances of new syntheses; the working out of unexpected implications of these syntheses.

Polkinghorne takes very seriously the challenge that the diversity of theologies, East and West, poses for someone like himself who believes in theology as a discipline that makes serious truth claims. He has no simple strategies to offer for overcoming the troubling diversity of apparently incompatible reli-



"The Theory of Chaos? It could be anywhere."

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gious insights, and admits that "the particularities of the world faiths contrast strongly with the universality of scientific understanding." Still, he clearly hopes that the rapid advances in the natural sciences and the growing openness to theological insight he discerns in those advances, may serve in the long run to reduce religious particularity—though that is hardly sufficient of itself, he admits, to bring about doctrinal unity.

Polkinghorne realizes that he is advocating a closer bond between physics and theology than many who respect the insights of the two as much as he does would recognize. He admits that he is breaking in some respects with tradition in a discipline, theology, where tradition carries great weight. But he is convinced that the tradition is in this regard dangerously "deist"; that is, in separating natural science from theology as it did, it also separated the Creator too sharply from the world created, thus risking making the Creator irrelevant to a world increasingly seen as self-contained, in no need of a further "explainer."

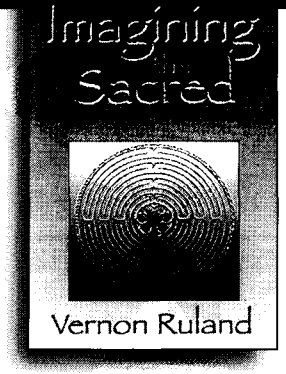
I would challenge the appellation "deist" for this alternative to Polkinghorne's approach. Deism draws such plausibility as it possesses in part from the assumption that God is temporal, that God can, as it were, walk away from his creation as soon as it is safely launched. But in the traditional Augustinian view, God's creation and his conservation meld into one; God is everywhere and at all moments active, each moment equally present to his knowledge and power. To subject God to the limitations of time, to suppose that God has to improvise moment by moment, is to reduce the Creator to the status of a creature, to subject God to the "emptying" that *did* occur in the Incarnation but that is excluded for the Creator as Creator.

From the perspective of the philosophy of science (a discipline as important to this discussion as are the two more obvious participants, science and theology), I would want to raise questions about, for example, the use of chaos theory to support a novel understanding of divine action in the world. To my mind, one cannot, as a realist, move from the epistemological to the ontological as Polkinghorne does in his treatment of chaos theory. The causal disturbances which the theory treats may be called "vanishingly small" as long as one recognizes that they do not actually *vanish*; they are always finite. As Polkinghorne admits, the accepted interpretation of chaos theory is still deterministic; it *may* be that Prigogine's nondeterministic alternative will yet "burst the wineskins" of the accepted view, but it is risky to rely on this for the controversial claim that God exercises a mode of "special" action in the interstices of cosmic process.

Again, the critical realism of natural science does not, to my mind, carry over into theology. The affinities that Polkinghorne finds between the development of Christian doctrine and the recent development of quantum mechanics do not extend to the manner in which the two sorts of development were *validated*. But it is upon the mode of validation that the thesis of scientific realism depends. And the arguments that are advanced on its behalf simply do not carry over into theology. That is not to say that arguments might not be found for an appropriate doctrine of critical realism in theology, but these would have to be of a kind very different from those relied on in regard to natural science. They would assuredly differ considerably from one major faith to another, and even between the various Christian denominations.

There are clearly two different styles of approach to the theology-science dialogue at stake here. Polkinghorne's unpretentious little volume offers an admirable introduction to the more "convergentist" of the two, as well as to the dialogue generally. His graceful literary style and his skill in making difficult technical issues accessible commend his work to the general reader. His success in finding possible points of contact between thought-forms usually considered remote from one another cannot fail to impress. □

Ernan McMullin *is the O'Hare Chair Emeritus of Philosophy and director emeritus of the Program in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Notre Dame.*



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Paradise
Toni Morrison
Alfred A. Knopf, $25, 320 pp.

Elizabeth Bartelme

Toni Morrison's new novel, *Paradise*, is overpowering in its narrative drive, its poetic resonance, its unique approach to the black experience. Morrison introduces an enormous number of characters, and imagines immensely complicated relationships in creating the life of an entire town, from its founding to the disastrous events that force it to face up to harsh realities. The basic tenets of Christianity and the hope of redemption and resurrection figure prominently in her story. This is a large menu, but Toni Morrison is a most accomplished chef. What she has produced here is food for the soul with exotic touches.

The novel opens in 1974 with events of unmitigated violence and horror. The narrative then flashes back to the forced migration of Negroes after the Civil War. Leaving Louisiana and Mississippi, they are rebuffed and rejected, even by their own people, until they reach the wide, treeless plain of Oklahoma and establish Ruby, a town that will belong exclusively to them. There, nine families of pure black blood—"the 8-rocks" (from a term signifying the deepest, darkest level of a coal mine)—put down roots. For them, Ruby was to be a paradise on earth, their own utopia. And so it was for the early generations. Wives were modest and loving; men strong and hard-working; children obedient. And nobody went "Outside."

Outside was full of temptations, bad news, evil. And as time passed, "the Convent," just down the road a few miles from Ruby, began to exemplify the wickedness of the world. The Convent had been a Catholic school for Indian girls, but now the school was closed and only Consolata, the aging ward of the former mother superior, and the superior herself lived in the old residence.

Then women injured in body and spirit began to appear at the Convent's door. Mavis, for example, had accidentally killed her infant twins by leaving them in a car while she shopped for groceries. Terrified of her abusive husband, she stole his Cadillac and lit out for the territory. Consolata took her in. Next came Grace, wanting to be called Gigi, looking for a man, but good-hearted under a tough exterior. Then the young girl from Ruby, claiming she'd been raped, and gradually more and more women.

Morrison is particularly good at portraying women—Mavis is heart-wrenching, as is Seneca, who carves little gashes into her body. And there is Pallas, the youngest, unbelieving that her mother and her lover could betray so cruelly.

Pallas is not the only victim of betrayal. Consolata, now called Connie, has for forty years loved God faithfully and felt no need for any other love. But suddenly she is thrust into a maelstrom of passion. The man is an 8-rock and extremely handsome, as all the Ruby men are. The affair is intense and it is clear that no good will come of it. Finally the man moves on, leaving Connie devastated. At this point, her lover's wife, Soane, visits the Convent and the two women, against all expectations, become friends. Meanwhile the town has begun to boil. Wives have turned against their spouses, children answer back, no one listens to the preachers. The climax comes after a wedding in town when the guests from the Convent arrive in the old Cadillac, "looking like go-go girls . . . Jezebel's storehouse raided to decorate arms, earlobes, necks, ankles and even a nostril." Raucous music and dancing follow.

It is too much for the men of Ruby. This corruption must be wiped out. A lynching party is organized and the Convent and the town are plunged into a nightmare of violence and death.

Morrison moves into the fantastical at this point, a notably difficult exercise to bring off. She does it with bravura and not for a moment do we doubt that Mavis is reunited with her daughter or that Gigi finds her father in prison. Left behind is their friend Billie Delia, a Ruby woman wondering when and if her friends will return . . . "with blazing eyes, war paint, and huge hands to rip up and stomp down this prison calling itself a town...a backward noplace ruled by men whose power to control was out of control....She hoped with all her heart that the women were out there biding their time....Which is to say she hoped for a miracle."

And perhaps she got it. When Ruby's Deacon Morgan does public penance for his sins, it is miraculous to observe his change of heart. The women of the Convent have changed everything and perhaps given their lives for this miracle. But perhaps not. There they are, reaching out from wherever they may be, to bestow forgiveness and loving kindness on those who have injured them.

Among other novels, Morrison has written three major works: *The Song of*

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Solomon, *Beloved*, and now *Paradise*. Her books resonate with her passion and commitment to racial dignity and equality, but also with her immersion in a fictional world unlike any other. She gives vivid expression to black bitterness, while at the same time subjecting certain middle-class aspirations based on white achievements to a subtle critique. Morrison understands the suffering, the mythology and religion of the black community in a way that few writers do and allows her great gifts to illuminate them. Even her ghosts seem alive and lively. She is, without doubt, one of our finest writers. □

Elizabeth Bartelme, *a long-time* Commonweal *contributor, lives in New York City.*

OUR NEIGHBOR'S KEEPER

The Warrior's Honor
Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience
Michael Ignatieff
Metropolitan Books, $24.95, 207 pp.

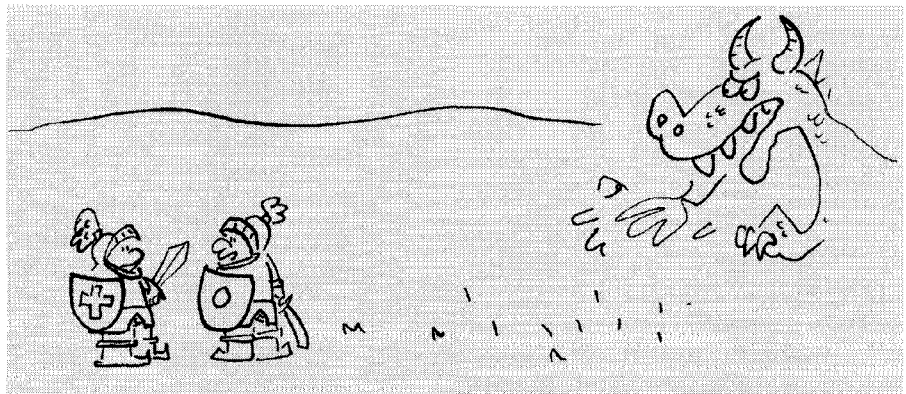
Jean Bethke Elshtain

British journalist Michael Ignatieff continues his tour through the rubble and ruin of late twentieth-century violence in his latest book. If, in *Blood and Belonging* (1993), he took us inside situations of internecine disintegration and war, here he aims to probe the mentality of Western nations that embark on intervention, aid, and assistance to those in trouble or those we think will likely be in trouble unless we assist in putting things right. This mix of "moral solidarity and hubris" intrigues Ignatieff, a frequent contributor to the *New Republic* and the *New York Review of Books*. "What impulses led us to supervise elections in Cambodia, try to protect the Kurds from Saddam, send UN troops to Bosnia, restore democracy to Haiti, bring the warriors to the table in Angola?" There is a further question: how are our "zones of safety" and their "zones of danger" linked? Why do we feel that we must "do something" for strangers well beyond our own families, friendships, and nations?

Ignatieff devotes five essays, here collected, to the matter. This is not a work in systematic moral philosophy; rather, Ignatieff gathers intimations, impressions, and narratives in a way that adds up to a decent road map if not a comprehensive encyclopedia. Here is the world according to Ignatieff. First, we citizens of the settled West are everywhere, as "aid workers, reporters, lawyers for war crimes tribunals, human-rights observers"—on and on. Clearly, the problems of other people concern us. So we get involved. Why does the world we find seem so chaotic and terrible? In the past fifty years an ever more robust regime of human rights has grown up alongside the most horrific carnage. The first discovery we make, then, is that "human rights have little or no purchase on this world of war. Far better to appeal to these fighters as warriors than as human beings, for warriors have codes of honor; human beings—*qua* human beings—have none." That, in a nutshell, is Ignatieff's thesis and the text is devoted to its exploration.

Ignatieff does well to warn us off a few of our pet evasions, the most common being that the tribal bloodshed in Rwanda, the upheavals in India, the disaster in Bosnia, can be summed up as "atavistic eruption of...incorrigible tribalism," an urgency we in the West long ago left off or never suffered in the first place. That is far too easy, he insists, as it doesn't reckon with the overwhelming fears created by the "disintegration of states," especially in light of the fact that there are no alternative institutions that help individuals to form and to hold secure civic identities. The temptation of triumphalism may be great on our part: we respect human rights; they do no such thing. Ignatieff suggests that we have no real idea of what it would be like to find ourselves in situations that resemble Chapter XIII of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

Yet we are drawn as moths to flames to the Bosnias and Rwandas. Why? Television is his preferred answer, a "new kind of electronic internationalism linking the consciences of the rich and the needs of the poor." These images of human suffering prick the conscience and animate a moral claim. We were prepared for this response by Christianity and the radical equality of all persons in the eyes of God, an egalitarianism that fueled modern human-rights discourse and argument. To be sure, European imperialism embodied a particularistic definition of human obligations, dividing the world into "us" and "them," but the European heritage also contained the seeds of a powerful cor-



"Why don't you take this one?—I just got a wash-and-wax."

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rective to this moral partiality. Universalism now trumps particularism. But the danger here is watery sentimentalism: we feel good about feeling bad about the misfortunes of others. Confronted with a "pure victim," we may fall into an unhealthy combination of pity and contempt as we prefer our victims to be blameless. Tougher by far to recognize that victims are likely to be victimizers as well—a narrative that doesn't play as well on television.

Moving to "the narcissism of minor difference," a term he owes to Freud, Ignatieff puzzles over identities and the sometimes deadly "fictions" of nationalism. He doesn't really get beyond the themes of *Blood and Belonging*, here repeating his argument about the ways in which, given a particular concatenation of circumstances, even minor differences get magnified into deadly incommensurabilities that blind human beings to the suffering of others and justify wounding those same others. Returning to the theme of moral disgust, Ignatieff scores the West's cautious and incautious reactions. We are sufficiently disgusted that we send UN troops into Bosnia and declare "safe havens." We are sufficiently loath to risk "our" lives for "theirs" that we stand by and watch helpless civilians being shelled to pieces in refugee cities. Perhaps, he suggests, we feel a kind of moral disgust toward victims, toward those who cannot help themselves.

Finally, he lifts up the honor of warriors and suggests that where human-rights language and just-war argument fall on hostile or uncomprehending ears, appeals to the honor of warriors might take us some distance in limiting the damage. Honorable warriors do not slaughter civilians indiscriminately. But it is none too clear how we are to go about enforcing codes of warrior honor in disintegrated situations and in light of the fact that, as Ignatieff makes painfully evident, many of those doing the killing are not warriors at all but irregulars who fight without training, without rules, and in the throes of a nigh-unlimited blood lust. Still, he would have us enforce the various Geneva Conventions that seek to ensure "that warriors conform to certain basic principles of humanity...." I'm not sure that has any better chance of stanching the flow of blood than appeals to human rights. But Ignatieff, horrified by what he has seen, believes that we should call up and call upon whatever is in our cultural and political armamentarium to interdict killing, and in this he is surely right.

The Warrior's Honor is vivid in description; thin in prescription. But we are all in Ignatieff's debt for his insistent plumbing of the heart of contemporary darkness. His concluding call for a healing "forgetting" if nations are to move on from traumatic collective wounds is particularly provocative. □

Jean Bethke Elshtain's *most recent book is* Real Politics *(Johns Hopkins).*

ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER

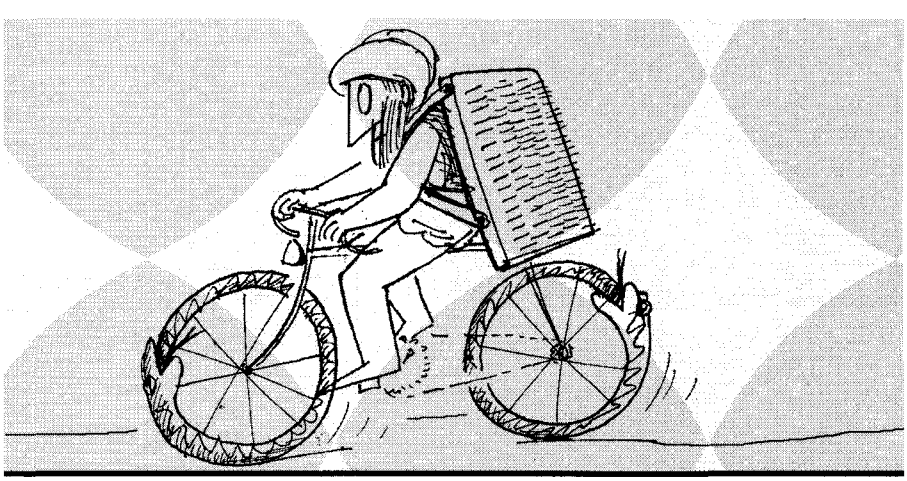
Abraham Joshua Heschel
Prophetic Witness
Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner
Yale University Press, $35, 402 pp.

Jack Riemer

This book is simply stunning! I know that it goes against the rules of reviewing to make such an uncritical statement, but I can't help it. What Edward Kaplan and Samuel Dresner have done in this biography is so remarkable that the regular rules of reviewing have to be suspended.

The book is remarkable on two counts. The first is the incredible research on display. It reads as if every scrap of paper that Abraham Heschel ever wrote or that anyone else ever wrote referring to him has somehow been found by these two. The sheer volume of the details of Heschel's life in Warsaw, in Vilna, in Berlin, and in Frankfort is astonishing. For example, there are photographs of Heschel at every age and that have never been published before. Kaplan and Dresner have unearthed the very first *hiddushei torah* that the young Heschel wrote in his childhood and have interviewed people who were able to describe the home and the street of his youth. They don't just tell us that he traveled from New York to Cincinnati; they say: "shortly before midnight on 9 April 1940, Heschel boarded an all-night train to Cincinnati, Ohio. He arrived at Hebrew Union College the next afternoon and settled in a dormitory room, the lodgings Morgenstern had promised."

Tracking down every detail of Heschel's life, every postcard and letter that he wrote, is in itself an enormous



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achievement. But this in itself could have led to a petty and a pedantic book. The authors do much more than accumulate data. They have a profound understanding of Heschel's inner life and they use all this information in order to craft a powerful portrait of a human being. For example, I knew that Heschel left Warsaw and moved to Vilna in his late teens. I never understood the reason: that it was in order to make contact with the world outside without embarrassing his family. I knew that Heschel was lonely in Berlin, but I didn't realize the depth of the poverty that he endured or the isolation he must have felt, living between two worlds, learning Western philosophy while holding on bravely to his Jewish commitment and to its central affirmation—that God is real and not just a symbol, that God cares, that God reaches out, and that God speaks—ideas that were absurd to his philosophy teachers who were willing to grant God the status of a hypothesis but not of a real being.

I also knew that Heschel had an ambivalent relationship to Martin Buber, but the book brings that ambivalence out clearly by letting us read the letters and even the postcards that Heschel wrote to Buber, who was richer, older, more famous, and more powerful than he was. Heschel wrote with deference but with the courage to affirm his own faith and to challenge the master. I knew that the Hebrew Union College had rescued Heschel and a number of others from Nazi Europe and I knew that Heschel was forever grateful. I didn't know how difficult a task that rescue was, how stubbornly Julian Morgenstern, president of the college, had to lobby the State Department until he got the visas for the teachers and students that he was determined to save, and therefore why Heschel never forgot what Hebrew Union College did for him.

There is material in this book for a dozen novels. One would tell how the prince of a Hassidic dynasty became a Yiddish poet. One would tell how a Yiddish poet somehow learned enough German and math and literature to gain admittance to a university in Berlin. One would tell how a scholar of medieval Jewish philosophy in the university became a comforter and a teacher to the bewildered Jews of Germany in the time of the Nazis. And one would tell about how all these different facets of his education came together to produce the mind that arrived in America, a mind trained and ready to teach reverence for the human being, in theory and in practice, to Jews and to all America.

Some stories in this book are so dramatic that only the authors' meticulous attention to detail makes them credible. When Heschel was twelve or thirteen—his father had died a few years before—the hassidim treated this child prodigy as if he were already their *rebbe*. But Heschel didn't want to be a *rebbe*; he wanted to enter the modern world. He knew that the gateway to the modern world was to learn Polish and so he begged his mother to buy him a Polish grammar. She did and he devoured it quickly. When he asked her to buy him a second volume, she turned him down, because they were so poor, and because she un-

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derstood what learning Polish meant. He came to the synagogue that Sabbath very upset, and decided to ask one *hassid* who prayed there and who was fond of him to give him the money for a Polish grammar. But when he walked into the synagogue, Sabbath had already begun. And one does not ask for material things on the Sabbath. Even though it was Sabbath, Heschel was so distraught that he came to the *hassid* after the services and asked for the money with which to buy the book. The next morning the *hassid* handed him a book of the sayings of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz. Heschel opened the book—and there was the money between the pages! Heschel had never in his life seen anyone handle money on the Sabbath. He says that he dropped the book, the way one would drop hot fire. And he asked the *hassid*: How could you do such a thing? How could you give me money on the Sabbath? The *hassid* explained: violating the Sabbath is a sin, a great sin. But melancholy, depression, on the Sabbath is an even greater sin. A person who is depressed cannot really observe the Sabbath. And so I gave you the money, even though it was the Sabbath, so that you would know that you have it to use after the Sabbath.

Heschel never got over that act of friendship. It taught him that observance is not an end in itself, that it must always be accompanied by intention, and that lifting the spirits of another human being is a *mitsvah*. Forever afterwards he fought for an understanding of Judaism that included law and love in inseparable combination.

There is more, much more, in this fascinating biography, which traces Heschel's life from his earliest years in Warsaw to the day he arrived in Cincinnati. Now we eagerly await the second volume, which will recount the story of how the man who was raised in a *shtiebl* became a moral force in the civil rights movement in America, a negotiator with the pope in Rome, a spokesman for the Jews of Russia, and "Father Abraham" to so many Catholic and Protestant theologians. That second volume should also tell how Heschel was able to translate the central insights that he learned in his childhood into a language that spoke to the minds and souls of so many in this land. □

Jack Riemer *is the rabbi of Congregation Beth Tikvah of Boca Raton. He is the chair of the National Rabbinic Network, a support system for rabbis across the denominational lines, and the co-editor of* So That Your Values Live On *(Jewish Lights).*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

ignore such material because it contradicts their preconceived theories.

Modern audiences may consider Pius XII's public statements bearing on this question to be vague, but in their own time they were often considered provocative. An example is a January 22, 1943 report by the Reich Central Security Office on the pope's 1942 Christmas message, cited by Anthony Rhodes in his 1973 book, *The Vatican in the Age of Dictators*. The report complained: "In a manner never known before, the pope has repudiated the National Socialist New European Order....Here he is virtually accusing the German people of injustice toward the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals." DIMITRI CAVALLI

Bronx, N.Y.

McConnell's blind spot

When he's not talking about religion or politics, your media critic Frank McConnell often has insightful things to say. I have seen some very good television that I might have missed but for his recommendations.

But McConnell's review of PBS's "Reflections on Vatican II" [September 11] illustrates a significant problem that shows up whenever he takes on a religious theme: in McConnell's muse, Christianity doesn't seem to count for very much. While the occasional saint or theologian is mentioned here or there, the notion that the Holy Spirit is guiding the church into all truth is generally absent.

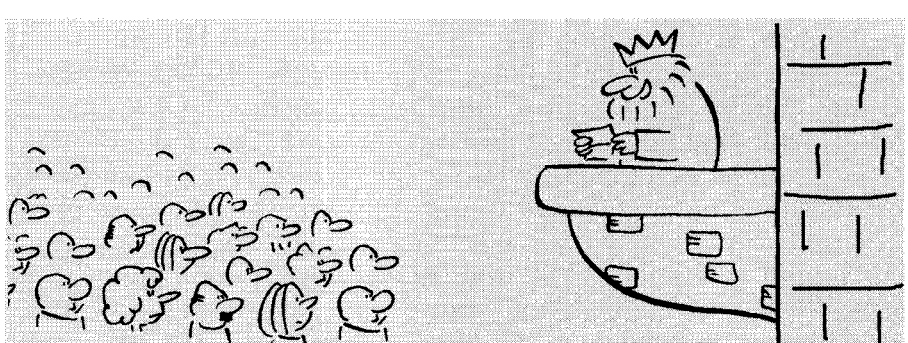
My problem isn't with his head-patting of "conservatives," including the present pontiff, but with the seemingly total lack of Christian perspective. I hope I'm wrong here, but McConnell seems to appreciate Vatican II primarily because he thought it would result in a church that would cater more comfortably to twentieth-century American liberal secularists, and it is a "failed revolution" because it didn't.

He strongly recommends the show, but I got little from his review other than his high opinion of what he expected the council to bring about. This and similar items leave me wondering what a man with so little apparent use for Christianity is doing writing in a Catholic magazine. DANIEL W. MUTH

Prince Frederick, Md.

Aesthetics of rock

Kudos to Bill McGarvey for his thoughtful piece, "Like a Rolling Stone" [September 11]. As a fellow Philadelphian, I too remember the



"...And birthday greetings go out from Sue to her brother Steve....Happy 50th from Binky to Elmer....Congrats to Flo and Al on their 30th wedding anniversary from their kids, Monica and Dick....A big 'Hi' to Frank and Louise...."

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"Viewers Guide to Movies" in the *Catholic Standard and Times*. Although its admonitions were mostly mocked in my family, it undoubtedly reflected the view that much in the culture was to be feared. How odd for a church that for centuries has preached Christ to the culture(s) in a way that took both seriously.

I hear McGarvey calling for a reinvigoration of a distinctly Catholic aesthetic sensibility. Like him, I believe such a sensibility is applicable to the world of pop music. He gives voice to many who have found "refracted rays of truth" in the most unlikely places, including the rock idiom. Inculturation is a current buzz-word. We need Christian musicians with a firm spiritual grasp and an ability to distinguish between the lame and the sublime.

JOHN J. GROGAN
Camden, N.J.

Mixed marriage: the up side

I found James Davidson's demographic piece [September 11] on interfaith marriages of interest, but I feel he has lost some focus by pessimistically encouraging same-faith marriages. Why not look at these statistics as a challenge, indeed an opportunity, to spread the Catholic faith. No, I'm not talking about wide-scale deceptive or coercive methods. In many marriages, a spouse is drawn to the Catholic faith by frequenting and participating in the community of worship. This can be the beginning of conversion to the truth; it can be helped along by a spouse and, when the person is ready, by a good RCIA group. The number of Catholic converts is impressive but understandable; once one gets to know the faith it is so compelling that it is impossible to ignore. Take that from an interfaith marriage convert. JULIE DONATI
Sugar Land, Tex.

Housing for all

It has been my pleasure to work with Representative Jim Wayne, author of "Affordable Housing" in your issue of August 14, on legislation to establish a dedicated source of state revenue for Kentucky's Affordable Housing Trust Fund. As the article points out, current housing policies are marked by retrenchment in federal social spending and a devolution of authority from the federal to the state level. The "work first" philosophy of welfare reform has demonstrated that work alone will not raise families out of poverty or give them access to housing they can afford. The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that the median renter would need a full-time hourly wage of $10.44 to afford a two-bedroom apartment at market rents. Needless to say, not many of the working poor earn at that rate. Yet without access to affordable housing and other basic human needs, families cannot successfully make the transition from welfare to work.

So far, devolution has not provided us with new models for solving

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the housing crisis. It's time for states to create institutions that enlist the American civic values of community participation and entrepreneurship toward the goal of a more just society. In housing, the foundation of those institutions already exists in the countless community-based nonprofits. But if their potential is to be realized, citizens, and particularly their leaders in state governments, must be willing to invest time and tax dollars toward the goal of making decent housing a possibility for those millions of Americans who are homeless, or live in miserably inadequate quarters, or must pay so much in rent that they lack funds for other basic needs. As Jim Wayne made clear, such investments pay off not only for families but for whole communities.

ALAN DAHL
Frankfort, Ky.

The writer is executive director of Homeless & Housing Kentucky Coalition.

Right on HMOs

Hats off to *Commonweal* and to writer Kip Sullivan ["Health Care Reform," April 24] for exposing the inefficiency of America's HMOs and their inability to control costs. Here in Minnesota, touted nationally as a model for Health Maintenance Organizations, 90 percent of insured Minnesotans are in HMOs, yet costs continue to skyrocket, with premiums going up 15 percent in 1998. Other aspects of health care are worsening as well: the number of Minnesotans uninsured rises every year, and opinion polls of health-care providers show the quality of care is deteriorating.

The human cost of our profit-driven HMOs is very high. Consider the case of Sharon, a twenty-six-year-old mother of three who presented to a colleague of mine when she was forty-two weeks pregnant, two weeks overdue, with a twelve-pound dead fetus. Because she could not afford health insurance, she had had no prenatal care. She died of an amniotic fluid embolus while an emergency Caesarean-section was being carried out.

Such tragedies need not happen. Every other major Western nation has universal health insurance with lower cost and higher quality care; none has HMOs. In America, nurses and doctors are being laid off to pad the profits of HMOs while an estimated 85 million Americans have trouble getting needed medical care. It is time to end our failed experiment with HMOs and reform health care by modeling any other Western nation.

GLENN PEARSON, M.D
Saint Paul, Minn.

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NO ENVELOPE, PLEASE

John Lynch

I have never submitted to the envelope system. In whatever city or town we have lived, I have preferred to align myself with a laity unnumbered, hopefully generous, and anonymous. One of the earliest memories I have of stout Father Connolly is a Sunday in the midst of the Depression, when I first discovered in the parish bulletin my father's name on the list of contributors to the previous week's collection. In what seemed to me a bold and confrontational reckoning, there it was: DANIEL M. LYNCH – 50 cents.

Was the pastor trying to humiliate my father? Hadn't my father in past years been president of the Holy Name Society, didn't he call numbers at the bingo games? Wasn't my mother in the Altar Society and my older brother an altar boy? What was wrong with this fat priest? I searched further on that Sunday morning. There were my friends' fathers: Bill Brennan's – 25 cents; Sam Orcutt's – 50 cents; Peggy Wheeler's – 35 cents. How long had this been going on, holding these parents up to ridicule? I can only imagine the uneasiness and embarrassment fathers and mothers suffered as they placed a quarter or two quarters or a quarter and a dime in the Sunday envelope, knowing that it would be revealed to the entire parish.

My parents would not for an instant have considered bypassing the traditional envelope system; and now in the hands of Father Connolly it had betrayed them. Assuredly, it was one of the church's ways of keeping track of the saved and the unsaved, the pious and the backsliders, the wealthy and the poor and the middle class. But at that early age (too young even to be an altar boy myself), I was both confused and defensive, not much caring about the circumstances, the cost of heat and light, the age of the church's roof, the need to pave the parking lot.

I had stood on a chair and peeked and was aware that my father every Monday morning on his way to work would leave a five-dollar bill on the fireplace mantel for my mother to buy groceries for six people for a week. He repaired our shoes with adhesive kits sold at Woolworth's, trimming foot-shaped pieces from cheap rubber and gluing them on soles you could nearly see through. He bought our winter jackets and leather hi-tops (they were preferably worn with corduroy knickers; there was a handy pocket for a jackknife on the right boot) at the discount clothing store of the Ford Motor Company in Highland Park, Michigan. He then waterproofed them with bacon fat in our kitchen. Mother darned our socks and sewed dresses for my sisters.

I never did succeed my brother as an altar boy. Father Connolly had gout and carried a cane at the altar. During one Sunday high Mass my brother moved too slowly for Father and he blindsided Dan and whacked him across his crimson-cassocked bottom with the cane. Dan carried out his commitment, but when my turn came my mother refused to let me serve.

In a Detroit suburb in the '50s, I had a pastor who often dispensed with the sermon, came down from the sanctuary, and pranced into the center aisle, pointing and proclaiming to his pew-bound flock: "I know who you are. I know where you work, I know what you make, I know what kind of car you drive. You're not fooling me. The Lord isn't getting his share!" Within a year, through this and other idiosyncrasies, the pastor had qualified himself for removal and was shipped westward for counseling, where he could bring his histrionics under control and obtain a better grasp of his ministry.

We have lived in Massachusetts for thirty-seven years now. Our first pastor bullied his assistants and acted the good priest-bad priest with his parishioners. Some converts said they would not have come into the church if it hadn't been for him; others were abandoning the parish because of him. When our family had a particularly difficult time one year, in reply to a request for his Grand Annual Collection, I sent the pastor, in a truly unguarded moment, a letter explaining our financial situation and pledging to catch up with a named sum when things got better and I could afford it. Since I had opted for fiscal anonymity on a regular basis, I thought it the least I could do to show that I belonged to the parish.

One of my daughters came home from CCD class one Saturday and announced that everyone was reading my letter—it had been posted on the bulletin board in the church vestibule, glass-enclosed and padlocked. I drove to the church and appealed to one of the assistants to get it out of there. I threatened to break the glass. I threatened to cut away the padlock. I threatened to go to the cardinal! In time the pastor relented, but with no apology and dogged insistence, said that he would not return my letter. I drove sadly home, bruised and wondering if I was in my right mind. Regardless, three months later I kept my pledge, but few words ever again passed between us. □

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John Lynch *lives in Framingham, Massachusetts. His article "Loaded and Fired Machine Gun..." appeared in the April 24* Commonweal.

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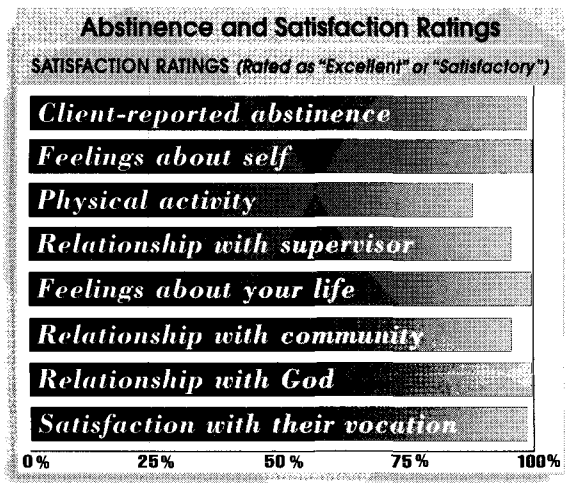

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